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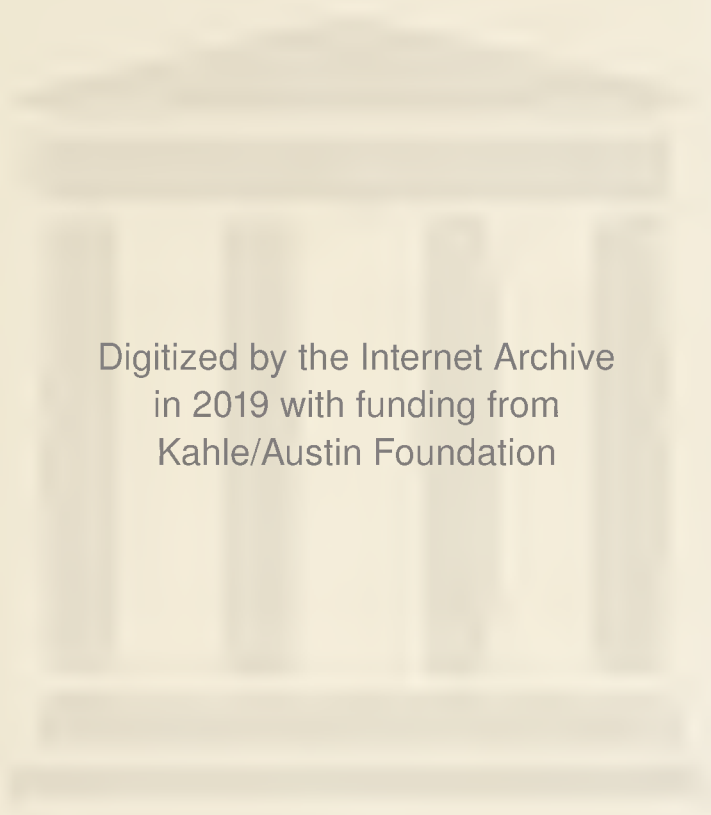


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NIGHTS AT THE PLAY



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THE LATE JOHN M. SYNGE

NIGHTS AT THE PLAY

BY
H. M. WALBROOK

WITH PORTRAITS

LONDON
W. J. HAM-SMITH
1911

PR 625 . W3

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PREFACE

This book appears in a moment of renewed hope for the future of the British Theatre. For years the weakness of our stage has been its ever-growing domination by the English capital. If there was a new play to be produced it had to be produced in London. If a Yorkshire woman or a Lancashire man felt moved to "go upon the stage" the journey to London had to be taken before he or she had the slightest chance of realising the ambition. As temples of a new Drama, or schools of the actor's art, the provincial theatres practically ceased to exist. They were all open, week after week, for little more than "London Successes," played by actors and actresses strictly drilled to sink any personality and art of their own in the closest possible imitation of the performances of their London prototypes. And, when we think of the artistic quality of many of these so-called London Successes, and of the level attained in much of their acting, we can form a pretty accurate idea of the

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class of entertainment on which provincial playgoers have for years been largely compelled to subsist. As a result of this system the theatre in the provinces has lost much of its old popularity ; many able provincial dramatists have been discouraged to the point of despair of ever getting a hearing for their work ; and the practice of the art of acting at its highest has gravely deteriorated.

The first deadly blow was struck at this vicious state of things by the founding of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, which has resulted in the enrichment of our Dramatic Literature by a number of plays which are not less than masterpieces of their kind, and of the British Stage by the delicate art and attractive personalities of several unique, histrionic artists. The lady to whose generous enthusiasm that enterprise is largely due, Miss Horniman, has also established a repertory theatre at Manchester, in which various classic plays of the British Theatre have been presented in a pure form, a number of new works have been given a hearing, and the acting has been brought to a high level of sincerity and art. A theatre with similar ideals has been started at Glasgow ; and there is promise of another being in active operation at Birmingham before very long. As a result of these most happy events, the

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metropolis is no longer the only centre of dramaturgic and histrionic activity in the United Kingdom, and the British Drama is more alive at this moment than it has been within the memory of any living man. In moments of optimism I now even cherish the hope that all the leading provincial theatres will one day return to the so-called stock system, under which each had its own company and its own frequently changing repertoire, and was a veritable school of acting. That system was chiefly responsible for the art of every great British actor of the past hundred years from Kean to Irving; it established countless intimate ties between Theatre and People; and its abolition, leading to the ascendancy of London, was the greatest disaster that ever befell the British Stage.

In London also a notable thing has happened. The Theatre of Ideas has knocked at the door, and has been admitted. The victory of Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. John Galsworthy, and the success of such plays by other writers, as "The Thunderbolt," "An Englishman's Home," "Nan," "Diana of Dobson's," "Hannele," "The Blue Bird" and "The Passing of the Third-Floor-Back," have meant a stirring of the waters; and there are signs, at last, that our players are indeed fulfilling

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Shakspeare's ideal, and becoming "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time," instead of being mere exponents of the prettiness, passion and sentimentality of theatrical novelettes.

It is, therefore, as I have said, in a hopeful moment that this volume appears. It contains a record of some of the principal London theatrical productions of the period 1907-10, which witnessed the beginning, and alas! also the end, of Miss Lena Ashwell's management of the Kingsway Theatre and of Mr. Charles Frohman's repertory enterprise at the Duke of York's; the opening of Mr. Herbert Trench's management of the Haymarket; and visits to London from such players as Miss Julia Marlowe and Mr. E. H. Sothern, Signora Aguglia and Cav. Giovanni Grasso, Herr Albert Heine, and the Abbey Theatre Company.

The articles here reprinted are the work of one who loves the Theatre, and has derived some of the greatest pleasure of his life from the display of its varied allied arts. They were written under the conditions laid down by the majority of the theatrical managers of London for the writing of dramatic criticism for a London daily paper. That is to say, each is the result of seeing a play, reflecting upon it, and judging it in writing within a few

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successive hours. In transferring them to book-form, therefore, the author has here and there found it desirable to alter, add, or excise a phrase ; but for the most part they appear as originally written. They are offered in a spirit of gratitude and goodwill to the authors and artists who made so many of the evenings here recorded evenings of delight. There were other evenings—evenings of anguish, impatience, and despair ; but their memory needs no perpetuation here.

H. M. W.

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Lincoln's Inn, W.C.

THE Theatrical Reviews contained in this volume originally appeared in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and are now reprinted with the kind permission of the Proprietor, and of the Editor, to whom the writer begs to tender his grateful acknowledgments.

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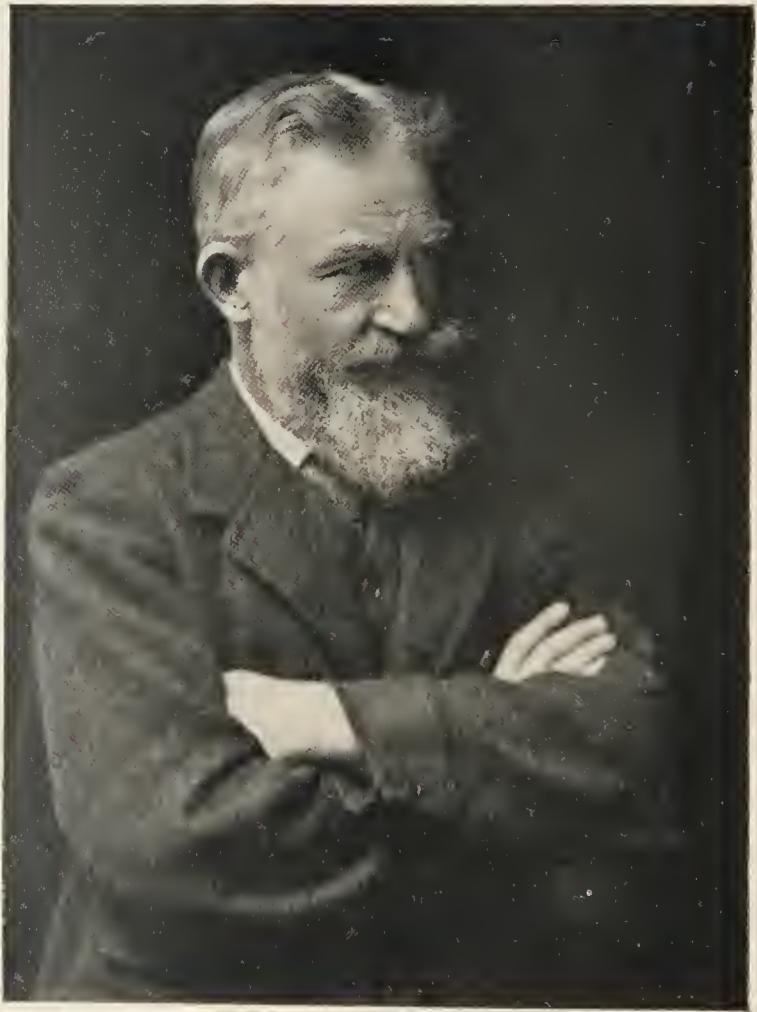
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MR. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

“ MISALLIANCE ”

By Mr. Bernard Shaw

The Duke of York's,
February 23rd, 1910.

HAVE you ever heard that little *rondo-caprice* of Beethoven, the title-page of which was found, after his death, to bear this inscription : “ *Die Wuth über den verlorenen Groschen, ausgetobt in einer Caprice,*” in his own handwriting ? If not—and it is seldom played in public nowadays (by the way, it is not only forgotten, but rather difficult)—seek the opportunity of doing so. It is one of the drollest of things, overflowing with the most genial anger in the world, the most amusing pathos, the most unbuttoned high spirits ; and all about a Lost Penny ! “ *Anger about a lost penny seething over in a caprice.*” A piece of sheer nonsense—and yet the nonsense that only a master could have written. Well, Mr. Bernard Shaw’s “ Misalliance ” is just such a Caprice, the most whimsical thing in the world, a piece of nonsense almost from beginning to end, but of a nonsense having so much wit and

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so much sense in it that it never bores. We have seldom felt the acts of a play pass so swiftly as did the first two of "Misalliance," and although the third was a good deal longer, it seemed to slip by nearly as quickly. As the author suggests, it may not be a play at all ; though our own view is that it has quite as much plot and characterisation as most of the plays of the day—and a great deal more than some we could name. Play or debate, it is uncommonly exhilarating.

Its chief character is John Tarleton, possessor of "Tarleton's Underwear," with a handsome house and grounds on Hindhead, a practical, manly son, called Jack, a sensible, gentle, motherly wife, and a rebellious daughter, Hypatia, who is sick of being the slave of her parents, and wants to "do things," to "live," to be "an active verb, not a passive one." And visiting the Tarletons are Lord Summerhays, an elderly, retired Indian Governor, and his son, the Hon. Bentley, the latter a "little squirt of a thing," ever ready to be insolent to Jack, and as ready to cry hysterically at the prospect of a thrashing. But the Hon. Bentley has been accepted by Hypatia, principally for the reason that, though he has not much body, he has more brains than the other young men who have proposed to her. Lord Summerhays himself, by the way, has also proposed to Miss Tarleton, only to be refused with the contumely of Youth. Suddenly, however, there descend from the skies, in an aeroplane,

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Joseph Percival, who has both brains and body, and Lina Szczepanowska, a comely Polish music-hall performer, acrobat, conjurer, tight-rope walker, and so forth ; and Hypatia promptly falls in love with Joseph, while the Tarletons, *père et fils*, make proposals to Lina. Papa's being more candid than honourable, are brushed amiably aside by the lady ; while Jack, offering marriage, is overwhelmed with a torrent of eminently Shavian vituperation.

Lastly, there creeps stealthily into the room, revolver in hand, Julius Baker, Tarleton's natural son by one of his shop-girls, and now a clerk earning thirty shillings a week. He has come to avenge his dead and wronged mother's doom by killing his father. Concealing himself in a portable Turkish-bath to await the coming of his victim, he is the unsuspected witness of Hypatia making love to Joseph ; and, when at last Tarleton, senior, enters the room, the young man who is about to slay him delays the tragedy while he declaims against the morals of the women of the capitalist class. This ultimately brings down upon him the wrath of the brawny Joseph, and when the things are at a dangerous climax, the lady-acrobat enters and disarms the clerk, who is then compelled to sign an abject apology for his reflections on the irreproachable conduct of Miss Tarleton. He is sneaking from the house when Mrs. Tarleton, discovering who he is, and knowing the story of his mother, takes him to her

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maternal bosom, and has the apology torn up. In the end, Hypatia throws over the Hon. Bentley and becomes engaged to Joseph, who demands, and receives from her father, the promise of a handsome allowance ; and, after a stormy speech from the Polish lady-acrobat on the womanly glory of independence and daring, the debate draws to a close and the curtain falls.

The above summary does very little justice to Mr. Shaw's story, and none whatever to his wit. For these, our readers must be referred to the play itself. They will find it a feast, in the author's best comic vein. They must hear for themselves Mrs. Tarleton discussing the "nasty minds" of duchesses and countesses who in her presence discussed such things as drainage and hygiene. "I lost my innocence listening to those duchesses !" she says, in a horrified whisper. And Hypatia Tarleton saucily challenging Joseph to go with her to the hill-top and chase her across the bracken, and that well-regulated young athlete recoiling with indignation, and congratulating himself on the blessed protection of a good, stiff conventionality. And Mr. Tarleton, senior, quoting Kipling and Chesterton, Ibsen and Shaw, and rolling their names from his lips with the unctuousness of a tradesman who feels he ought to have been a writer if the larger and higher life of Business had not claimed him. "Authors," he cries, "are only the failures and refuse of Business ! They all began in an office !"

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And Lord Summerhays laying down the philosophy of government : “ Men are not governed by Justice but by Law, and if they refuse that, then by Fraud—or Persuasion ” ; and again : “ Governing the Empire has been a fine thing—for the governed. It has made the nigger half an Englishman and the Englishman half a nigger ! ” And Hypatia, denouncing the way in which parents exasperate their children ; and Julius Baker inveighing against the “ damnable waste of life ” involved in being a clerk ; and Lina’s apostrophe of Freedom and Daring—and a score of other and better things. We do not say that everything in “ Misalliance ” is original, but even the most familiar ideas—that, for instance, of the want of sympathy, the shyness, that so often subsists between parents and children—are put in a new and sparkling way. In fine, the audience had to thank Mr. Shaw for a very brilliant evening, and it did so with all possible warmth.

Mr. Charles Lowne as Tarleton, senior, was at his best throughout ; so also were Mr. Frederick Lloyd as Tarleton, junior, Miss Florence Haydon as Mrs. Tarleton, Mr. Hubert Harben and Mr. Donald Calthrop as the Summerhays, father and son, Mr. Charles Bryant as Joseph, and Mr. O. P. Heggie as the crushed clerk. Miss Lena Ashwell’s Lady-Acrobat was weak only in the foreign accent, the touches of which, like angels’ visits, were few and far between ; while we can conceive the part of Hypatia played with more charm

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than Miss Miriam Lewes contrived to superimpose on the admirably suggested discontent and mental and bodily hungers of the young lady. The scene, Mrs. Tarleton's drawing-room, with a lovely landscape visible beyond the glass doors, made a charming setting for the author's flights of criticism and fancy.

“THE SHOWING-UP OF BLANCO POSNET”

*Aldwych Theatre,
December 6th, 1909.*

MR. BERNARD SHAW's play, "The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet," to which the Lord Chamberlain refused the right of public performance, was acted at the Aldwych Theatre by the company from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, under the auspices of the Incorporated Stage Society. In the case of one or two previously censored plays which this Society has produced in this semi-private fashion, its action could be quite accurately described as a handsome vindication of the censor's good taste and judgment. In the present case we cannot, for the life of us, discover on what rational grounds the play was refused a licence.

Can it have been for the reason that one of the characters is a woman who has been living a vicious life, and labels herself, and is labelled by others, rather more frankly than is customary? Characters a hundred times more brutal, and

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language infinitely more candid in an ugly way, have been "passed" over and over again. Besides, Mr. Shaw would doubtless have had no objection to tone-down any objectionable sentences, so long as he was not asked to put the language of a Belgrave Square drawing-room into the mouths of the rough men and women of a small American town. Can the reason have been that the chief character—a wild figure who might have come out of some of Bret Harte's pages—goes in superstitious terror of a God whom he believes to be a trickster, waiting to pull him up from his evil courses by some sudden appeal to his emotions, his cry-babbiness? This is still more unthinkable. Is it the Lord Chamberlain's idea—is it the belief of any conceivable English audience of intelligent men and women—that a cursing, revolver-drawing, nigger-lynching, horse-stealing, bar-haunting, prairie-roaming son of the Wild West, would formulate his conception of the Almighty in the beauty and humility of the language of a Dr. Johnson? Blanco Posnet feared his Maker in a queer, familiar way, which, however, brought Him very near; and if the Censor or anybody else regards that attitude as blasphemous, then all we can say is that it sounds to us about as silly as the objection some folk take to Dickens: "He portrays common types, therefore his books are vulgar"—a criticism one always enjoys hearing, it is so extraordinarily foolish. As we feel compelled to

“ The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet ”

dismiss both these explanations of the Censor's action as too preposterous for words, and can think of no other, we can only express the hope that the ban on the play will be removed, and a suitable apology and indemnity tendered to the author for the loss and annoyance the prohibition has caused him.

Blanco Posnet has stolen a horse which he believes to belong to a certain canting brother of his, who has acted dishonestly towards him. While he is riding away, he is stopped by a woman with a dying child ; and, in a moment of cry-babbiness and bitter self-contempt, he lets her have the horse so that she may hurry off for a doctor. As a matter of fact the horse had really belonged to the Sheriff, and it has disappeared, so the thief has to take his trial. The rough court-scene practically composes the play. It is impossible to describe in detail, and after a single hearing, the wit, irony, imagination, and eloquence which the author has poured into his picture. The various characters are filled out in a quite wonderful way—the Sheriff, mechanically platitudinous on such subjects as Religion and Law, but exceedingly short and to the point on the subject of getting his horse back ; the Elder, with his hypocritical evangelicalisms ; the bad woman of the town, malignant against Posnet for reasons as creditable to him as they are discreditable to herself ; the roaring jury-men eager for the blood of a horse-stealer ; and

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the pale mother, whom the prisoner had befriended, and at the sight of whose face he recoils in terror, believing her apparition to be "one of *His* tricks!" These, and the other figures, are sketched with a master's strength and sureness of effect, and the whole thing is intensely dramatic; its interest as a story never flags. It is also one of those blends of realism and poetry which Mr. Galsworthy has stated in the *Fortnightly* to be impossible of attainment. Its realism we have already indicated. Its poetry is not so easy to describe without quotation; but every sensitive person who heard Posnet's shriek that the Lord had written a message of triumph over him in green letters along the red streak of the rainbow, must have felt—oddly as the message was worded (and its very crudity was part of the poetry of the thing)—that he was listening to something beyond prose.

Another thrilling passage was that in which the mere sight of the pale face of the good woman suddenly silenced the perjuries of the bad one—a remarkable moment, indeed, in a play which the Censor regards as unsuitable to the English Stage! And the climax of it all is splendid. Posnet realises that there is a noble way of living and an ignoble, and that, hitherto, he has been choosing the ignoble; and he cries with rapture: "There's a great game, and there's a rotten game! I played the rotten game, but He played the great game on me. And now, *I'm* for the great game,

“ The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet ”

all the time ! ” An odd ending to a play unfit for London ears ! Indeed, the uppermost feeling with which the audience left the theatre must have been one of astonishment that such a work should have been debarred from the public stage. “ The ordinary public would never have stood that description of the Deity as a trickster,” said a lady as we came away. Probably not, if it had not first *understood* it ; but, it is really a little hard that anyone in authority should rank the entire mass of Londoners as too stupid to realise that what may seem very irreverent to a seat-holder in Westminster Abbey may yet be perfectly reverent in a Wyoming stockman—or, for that matter, in a soldier in the East Ham branch of the Salvation Army.

The acting was realistic and sincere, notably that of Mr. Fred O'Donovan as Blanco, Mr. Arthur Sinclair as the hypocritical Elder, Miss Sara Allgood as the bad woman, Miss Maire O'Neill as the good one, and Mr. Sidney J. Morgan as the Sheriff. Indeed, the whole performance was characterised by that unselfish art for which the Abbey Theatre players are famous, all of them thinking of the character and the play, and none of them seeking applause or seeming to be conscious of an audience. It is not often we see a whole company acting in that way in London ; and when we do we may well be grateful.

"THE DARK LADY OF THE SONNETS"

*The Haymarket Theatre,
November 24th, 1910.*

MR. BERNARD SHAW's one-act play, called "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," is based on the drama which lies concealed in the sonnets of Shakspeare. The author has set his drama on the terrace of Whitehall Palace between eleven and twelve o'clock on a midsummer night ; and his characters are Queen Elizabeth, her frolicsome Maid of Honour, Mistress Mary Fitton, William Shakspeare, and a Palace Warder. The presence of Mary Fitton as the mysterious "woman colour'd ill" of the sonnets, shows Mr. Shaw among the Herbertists in the controversy as to whether Pembroke or Southampton was the "only true begetter" of those marvellous poems. In fact, Pembroke is specifically mentioned by the Warder as having paid several moonlight visits to the Terrace for the purpose of meeting the frolicsome Fitton.

The story can be briefly told. Shakspeare comes to keep a tryst with the young Maid of

“ The Dark Lady of the Sonnets ”

Honour ; and, while waiting, is surprised by the apparition of a lady walking in her sleep. He mistakes her for the girl “ whose pretty looks have been mine enemies,” and, having awakened her, is beginning to pour out his heart, when Mary, a harmony in flame-red, flies furiously in, calls the lady by a highly opprobrious name, gives Will a clout that sends him to the floor, and then discovers to her panic and horror that the lady is no other a personage than the Queen ! And her Grace looks so like mischief that Mary is presently glad to totter away, after warning her mistress in a terrified whisper against “ this man who is more than a man—and less than one,” and his awful power of words, “ that can raise a soul to Heaven or abase it to Hell ! ” The Poet, however, succeeds not only in pacifying his Sovereign, but in interesting her in himself and his schemes, and particularly in a certain scheme for the foundation of a National Theatre ; though her Grace’s knowledge of her people warns her that the time is not yet ripe for such an institution, that other nations will first have to set the example, and that probably in three hundred years (i.e. *circa* the present day) such a Temple of Dramatic Art and Literature may be set up. “ You and I will be ashes then,” says her Grace, sadly ; but William foresees and foreshadows his own immortality and hers. And, on his loyal “ God save the Queen ! ” and her proud “ Amen ! ” the curtain falls.

Original ! Yes, and welcome on that ground

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alone. But fifty times more welcome for the drollery with which part of it is written, and the sheer splendour of some of its more serious passages. The most comical thing in it is its picture of a Shakspeare picking up striking phrases from the talk of his interlocutors, and promptly making a note of them for use in his plays. For instance, the Warder, at first sight of him, cries, "Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" and the dramatist makes a note of the exclamation there and then. "Frailty, thy name is woman!" is another coinage similarly borrowed of the Warder; and when, noting the literary gentleman's little dodge, the worthy sentinel calls him a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, he makes a note of that too, in high delight. The conversation of the Queen proves even more profitable. She babbles in her sleep of the freckles that have come upon her hands, and moans that all the perfumes of Arabia will not wash them out. "All the perfumes of Arabia!" echoes the playwright luxuriously. "The music of the phrase!" Down it goes. And when, later, he bursts into a rhapsody on the magic of words, he thrills not only the Queen on the stage, but the audience in the theatre, and we listen for a few moments to an eloquence such as we rarely hear nowadays, except in a theatre, and even there only when Mr. Bernard Shaw happens to be the orator. And, comical as this Shakspeare's system of "snapping-up" appears, and ludicrous

"The Dark Lady of the Sonnets"

as sound his scornful allusions to the popular comedies, "As You Like It," and "Much Ado About Nothing," in comparison with "the Tragedies which are being played at the Globe to empty benches," the figure is one that should finally silence those stupid people who have taken various little flights of patent nonsense, together with sundry most excellent pieces of criticism, to imply that Mr. Shaw is the only sane person in Europe who declines to recognise the mastery of Shakspeare.

It was all played with perfect loyalty by Mr. Granville Barker as the Poet, Miss Suzanne Sheldon as the Queen, Mr. H. B. Tabberer as the Warder, and Miss Mona Limerick as the Lady in Red. That Mr. Barker's voice and aspect were quite those one associates with Shakspeare we should not say. Tones that always seem to be coming from a far-off corner in a monastery cloister do not suggest that most wonderful of all the sons of the Renaissance. However, having seen Mr. Barker in the part, we have no desire to see anybody else essay it. He suggested something like intellectual distinction, imaginative energy, and conscious power; and we could name a good many actors with warmer voices who would fail very depressingly indeed in those rather important respects. The costumes worn by Miss Sheldon and Miss Limerick were further delights. They had been designed by Mr. Charles Ricketts. We need say no more.

"FANNY'S FIRST PLAY"

The Little Theatre,

April 19th, 1911.

GENTLEMEN, off with your hats ! A great thing has happened. In three delightful hours the Court Theatre of 1904-7 has come back to us, with all the laughter and magic of the old days. Regrets have been poured forth in bucketfuls over the collapse of that memorable enterprise. Well, here it is again, with many of the familiar faces and voices, all the former finished art, and the Master-spirit of the movement, Mr. Bernard Shaw, with one of the most amusing plays he has ever written, one of the wittiest and most audacious of all his attacks on "the mean things which men have to do to keep up their respectability." The piece is called "Fanny's First Play," and the scene of its production yesterday afternoon was the Little Theatre. It was received with the heartiest laughter and applause so far heard beneath the roof of the John Street play-house ; and the curtain finally fell amid a storm of delighted cheering.

The story and the meaning of Mr. Shaw's play are difficult to compress into a few lines, but we

“ Fanny’s First Play ”

must make the attempt. Count O’Dowda, an elderly Irish aristocrat, with eighteenth-century ideas and ideals, has a daughter, Fanny, who has been to Girton, and has written a play, which her father is allowing her to produce at their country-house ; and at her request he has invited the critics of four of the London daily papers to come down and see it. He—good, easy man!—is assuming that it will prove an idyll of the eighteenth century, all grace, culture, and repose—a sort of dainty Harlequin-and-Columbine comedy, *tempore* Louis XV, as painted by Watteau. But, alas ! Girton has shaken the young lady out of any eighteenth-centuryism she may have inherited. Unknown to her father, she has not only become a Suffragette, but has been in prison for the Cause ; and from beginning to end her play turns out to be an uncompromisingly realistic picture of English “ respectability ” of the most narrow and Philistine description, working up to the final conclusions : that honest energy and natural impulse are better than all the conventionalisms ; that scorn of a sinner is in itself sin ; that pretence and lying are vulgar ; and that it is the duty of every man and woman to live his or her own life, not necessarily according to parental pattern, but always according to his or her own courage, energy, and self-faithfulness.

These truths are expounded in pictures of the homes of a certain Mr. and Mrs. Gilbey, whose

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son, Bobby, to their inexpressible shame, has been imprisoned for assaulting the police, and of a certain Mr. and Mrs. Knox, whose daughter, Margaret, in "one of her religious fits," after a Salvation Army meeting at the Albert Hall, has got into similar trouble for a similar crime. The glow of the hymns had got into her blood and left her aching for "life." The emotions and ideas of the young man and young woman, and of their respective parents, are mingled with those of a good-hearted, so-called Daughter of Joy, whose acquaintance the young man has made, and of a vivacious and intelligent young French officer of Marine, who has made Miss Knox's acquaintance at the Empire, escorted her, with every courtesy and decorum, to a very merry but highly disreputable ball, and been her partner in a subsequent encounter with the police and the resultant imprisonment. Meanwhile, the Higher Ideal of character and deportment is solemnly expounded throughout the play by no less humble a person than the Gilbeys' butler, Mr. Juggins, who sets forth his views with infinite stateliness, but much to the scorn of his employers, until they discover in the end that he happens to be the younger brother of a Duke, whereupon they accept with tremulous thankfulness his proposal for their daughter's hand.

Such is the play enacted before Count O'Dowda, the four critics, and the audience in the Little Theatre. Its effect upon the Count,

"Fanny's First Play"

with his general Pergolesian and Mozartian ideals, can be imagined. He is too grieved for words. Its effect on the four critics finds expression in a discussion between them and O'Dowda which is packed with shrewd and yet never unkind personalities, which convulsed yesterday's audience, and should have a similar effect on future assemblages, for, after all, certain types of critics belong to the permanent and are universally recognisable. Its effect on the rest of the audience we have already described. The whole thing is a brilliant and powerful social commentary, expressed largely in comic terms, sprinkled thickly with incidents of the most diverting kind, and at the same time charged with sufficient seriousness to drive its real meaning home.

It was beautifully acted. To praise justly would really mean to praise all, and for that we have not the space. We must, however, mention the defiant Margaret of Miss McCarthy, the laughing *fille-de-joie* of Miss Dorothy Minto, the stately Juggins—we like that phrase, the stately Juggins—of Mr. H. K. Ayliff, the gay and eloquent Anglophile French lieutenant of Mr. Raymond Lauzerte, the elegant Count O'Dowda of Mr. Harcourt Williams, the sympathetically observed Mrs. Knox of Miss Cicely Hamilton, and the Mr. Trotter (one of the critics) of Mr. Claude King as conspicuous among a series of impersonations of which each was more or less a delight.

"THE THUNDERBOLT"

By Sir Arthur Pinero

*The St. James's,
May 9th, 1908.*

NOTHING could be more dramatic than the basic situation of Sir Arthur Pinero's play "The Thunderbolt"—the passionate hunger of a group of comparatively poor men and women for the money of a rich brother who has died apparently intestate. Their name is Mortimore, and they belong to one of the lower strata of the middle class; but, as the most masterful of them says: "We Mortimores are one of the oldest, and I'm bound to say one of the most respected, families in Singlehampton." Life, however, has been a hard business for them. As the same man says later: "We're prominent men in the town. . . . We're looked up to as being fairly warm and comfortable; but in reality we're not much better off than the others. . . . We've never had any capital. . . . When the day comes for us to be knocked out, there'll be precious little—bar a stroke of luck—to end our days on." They are

"The Thunderbolt"

just a little group of honest, struggling people, doing their best to keep their heads high, and to give their children a better start in the world than they have had themselves. James, the eldest, is a builder, a vigorous man, apparently between fifty-five and sixty. Stephen, the next, is proprietor and editor of the Singlehampton "Times and Mirror," and probably also a jobbing printer, struggling along with an antiquated plant. Rose, the sister, has married a retired colonel, and is in society of a sort in "South Belgravia," while Thaddeus, the youngest, a teacher of music, and his wife Phyllis, have endured sixteen years of self-denial for the sake of their children. The three brothers are all nearing that time of life in which money-making will be harder than ever, while the colonel and his wife are concerned with the expensive ambition of the social "climber."

Consequently, when the news comes that brother Edward, the rich brewer, has died, leaving a fortune, "all personal estate," worth nearly £200,000, and no will, involving an equal division of his wealth among his next-of-kin, they all become desperately anxious for the distribution of the spoils. Brother James has a great building scheme he can now carry through; brother Stephen will be able to renew the plant at his printing office; and sister Rose and the Colonel have their eye on a house near Berkeley Square. Even brother Thaddeus, less outwardly

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greedy than the rest, sees with placidly happy eyes an end to his struggles ; while his pale, trembling wife is almost ill, apparently with ecstasy. Their daughter Joyce, she sobs, will now look sweeter and daintier than ever ; their boy, Cyril, will have a first-class public-school education, and they will all leave Singlehampton, where she and her husband have been snubbed because her father kept a grocer's shop.

It is a commonplace that a sudden prospect of money may, if there be a little uncertainty about it, convert quite decent people into the very reverse ; and, round the death-bed of brother Edward, the Mortimores all become bitter, squabbling, envious creatures. For there *is* an uncertainty—and presently the thunderbolt falls. The dead man has left a will after all ; and a will in which every penny he possessed has been bequeathed, not to his brothers or sister, but to a natural child, one Helen Thornhill, of whom his relatives (from whom he had been estranged for years) had known nothing. And then we learn that Phyllis's shaken condition is not the result of joy, but of mental agony ; for, while attending the dying man for an hour or two, she has discovered the document, read it, realised all its probate would mean for herself and her children—and destroyed it. Here is an intensely dramatic development out of a situation already full of promise. Unable to keep her secret, the wretched woman blurts it out to her husband ; and he, an

“ The Thunderbolt ”

honourable man, promptly resolves that justice must be done to Miss Thornhill. At the same time, wishing to spare his wife, he informs his family that he himself has been the thief. A cross-examination, however, by a shrewd lawyer, one Mr. Elkin, causes his story to break down, and gradually the truth comes out that Phyllis has been the criminal; and the collective passion of the Mortimores is concentrated upon a fresh object. In the end Miss Thornhill comes to the rescue. She has grown to like Thaddeus and Phyllis and their children; and, being a girl of intelligence and of sympathy, she has understood the mother-feeling which was at the bottom of the wife's crime. She consents to the assumption that the late Mr. Mortimore has left no will, and to a division of the estate, share and share alike, between herself and the dead man's brothers and sister, with the proviso that an equal share shall go to one of the local hospitals as a memorial to her father. Thaddeus and his wife decline their share, whereupon Miss Thornhill insists upon it being settled on their two children. The lawyers considerately retire from the business (one hopes, for their sakes, that the Law Society won't hear of the affair), and with everybody left provided for, and the prospect of all being well with the house of Mortimore, the play comes to an end.

It is a fine story, quite worthy of the author; and he works it out with extraordinary care. Thanks to his courtesy, we were able to read the

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play before the performance, and were astonished at the quantity and variety of character and incident packed into it, and at the masterly craftsmanship with which he has developed many of the scenes. At the same time a fear took possession of us that, on the stage, this very crowding of material would militate against the popular acceptance of the play; and so it proved. He has stuffed, not a three but a six-volume novel into his four acts, at the expense of the simplicity and directness of his story. The intricacy of motive becomes almost oppressive. One could easily fill two columns of analysis, and yet leave half the story untold. There are at least seven characters, each of whom might be the protagonist in a separate play. Take Miss Thornhill alone—the illegitimate child of a rich Midland brewer, cultured, beautiful, a girl of a deep, precocious humanity, hitherto luxuriously provided for in Paris, and suddenly left penniless through another's crime. There is a play there. Take the Colonel and his wife, both of them as ill-bred as they can be, yet possessed with the lust of social success, and suddenly confronted with a prospect of wealth which is as suddenly dashed away—there is another play. And so one could go on. Among all the "interests" which fill "The Thunderbolt" the most conspicuous is the act of sacrifice which Thaddeus endeavours to perform to shelter his wife. Another, far finer and subtler, is the pathos of the figure of

"The Thunderbolt"

Phyllis, the poor, loving creature who, wearied of poverty and struggle, succumbs to a deadly temptation for the sake of her husband and children. The author brings this out with perfect clearness in the book ; but in the theatre we failed to realise it. And this brings us to our third consideration, the acting.

It is an open secret that no living English dramatist exercises so complete a control over the production of his plays as Sir Arthur Pinero. He approves the cast ; he supervises the rehearsals with painful care. As a rule, therefore, he has his ideal realised. Yet something was wrong in "The Thunderbolt." For example, Miss Mabel Hackney, as Phyllis, failed to excite compassion. Instead of our hearts being wrung with pity, they were hardened in censure. We were left to imagine the rapturous love of husband and children which had made her crime possible. We saw the bitterness of wounded pride, the distaste of sordid poverty—but if it was these things that led her to steal and destroy the will, we have misunderstood the play, and should consider the motive inadequate. Surely Phyllis sinned for Love's sake ? If that be so, the play would have been raised by the actress getting more tenderness into her work. One really passionate embrace of her husband, one fierce clinging to her children, would have made such a difference ! At the St. James's all the tenderness and beauty came from Miss Thornhill, a

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figure presented with rare delicacy by Miss Stella Campbell. Again, in the part of the dreamy musician, Thaddeus, Mr. Alexander was not always happy. In the quiet scenes, of course, he was excellent. No one on our stage can better express a husband's kindly tenderness. But when, in the third act, the man became a kind of frenzied martyr, the actor was taxed beyond his powers. He was much too deliberate, and the effort was far too visible—and too audible. We could see a tortured face, but not realise a tortured soul. It was all very careful, very considered, very strenuous—yet it left us quite unmoved. The acting honours of the evening, indeed, really went to Mr. J. D. Beveridge, whose Mr. Elkin was a quite masterly thing, rich in dignity, geniality, and truth. The play was mounted with the verisimilitude of effect to which Mr. Alexander and the author have accustomed us, and it was always interesting to study the details of each stage-picture.

“ MID-CHANNEL ”

*The St. James's,
September 2nd, 1909.*

SIR ARTHUR PINERO paints a very grey picture of men and women in “Mid-Channel.” Nobody could recognise it, nor, we are sure, does the author offer it, as a sober study of English society ; but it doubtless deserves ample recognition as a hard, glittering, relentless, and very painful study of persons who at the best are useless, and, at the worst, brutal and vulgar beyond all toleration. The result is one of the bitterest plays we have sat through. Now and then came a breath of kindly human nature, a touch of gentle manners, a momentary revelation of that sympathetic insight into the hearts of natural men and women which the author has often shown in his serious work—and which was very conspicuous in “The Thunderbolt.” But, for the most part, “Mid-Channel” is a sheer horror. There is one scene in it which has very much the effect of an unexpected slap across the face ; and to regard the play as an “entertainment” in any generally

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accepted sense of the word is impossible. There is probably a moral at the back of it. Indeed, it may be said to enforce three or four lessons well worth enforcing; but whether the dramatist might not have secured all his moral effect with means a little less violent is a question upon which public opinion will, probably, be found fairly unanimous.

The chief characters are Theodore and Zöe Blundell. He is middle-aged, she thirty-seven; they have been married thirteen years; and they are very wealthy. Although somewhere in their queerly-constructed hearts love is still alive, he has grown neglectful (or she thinks he has), and she has become petulant, restless, and hungry for excitement. And they are childless. It had been Mr. Blundell's desire, expressed at the time of the marriage, that there should be "no brats of children" to encumber them in the race for wealth; and the wife now feels bitterly that, but for this, she might have been a different woman and he a different man. However, there they are, a well-dressed, well-fed, well-housed, nagging, bitter, and thoroughly Philistine couple, sharing a home that has become a hell, and drawing farther apart from each other every hour. At last, the inevitable separation comes. Theodore takes a flat in Cavendish Square, consoles himself with a certain Mrs. Annerly, takes to drink, and becomes more miserable than before. Zöe goes for an Italian

“Mid-Channel”

trip, is met at Florence by one of her London “boy” friends, a man called Leonard Ferris, and returns to town six months later, more restless, more wretched, and guilty. With a little exercise of tact, a mutual friend, Blundell’s partner, the Hon. Peter Mottram, brings the doomed pair together, and Theodore makes his confession, and is forgiven. Then Zöe makes hers; and forthwith all the brute in the husband flares forth again. “Ferris! . . . Damn you, you’ve quarrelled! . . . He’s chucked you! . . . Had enough of you! . . . You bring me his cast-off trash, do you? . . . Mr. Lenny Ferris’s leavings!” He concludes, however, by promising that if she can get Ferris’s pledge to marry her he will consent to be divorced. Upon that she proceeds to her “lover’s” flat, discovers that he has become engaged to one Ethel Pierpoint, a girl in society—and finishes herself and the play by throwing herself over the balcony.

Such is the story in its external essentials. We have shown what a brute Mr. Blundell could be—how he could respond to a woman’s “I’ve forgiven *you*; forgive *me*.” But we have said nothing of the lover. It is this character that renders “Mid-Channel” what we have called it—a horror. He is a boyish-looking man of thirty-two, with a couple of thousand a year, and Zöe calls him the dearest of her “tame robins.” For four years he has been hanging around her, and, before the crash in her life

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comes, she believes him “the simplest, wholesomest, best-natured fellow living.” Then comes the catastrophe, the Italian trip, and his forcing of his company upon her at Florence and Perugia. On her return to London, ashamed and frightened, she learns two things : one from Mottram, that a reconciliation with her husband is not beyond hope ; and the other from Mrs. Pierpoint, that prior to the Cisalpine adventure Ferris had clandestinely been paying marked attention to her daughter. Putting two and two together, she decides to make a clean breast of things to the young man, offer him his freedom, and part with him as friendlily as may be. His reply is couched in such terms that, compared with it, the subsequent insults of the husband sounded almost complimentary ! We give it *verbatim* from the printed copy of the play courteously provided by the author :

LEONARD. Do you think you can drum me out like this ! (*Following her.*) Have you got some other—— ? (*He checks himself.*)

ZÖE. (*Confronting him.*) Some other—— ?

LEONARD. Oh, never mind.

ZÖE. Out with it !

LEONARD. Some other fancy-man in tow ?

ZÖE. Ah ! you brute ! (*Hitting him in the chest.*) You brute ! (*Throwing herself into the arm-chair by the glazed door.*) You coward ! You coward !

Such is the language addressed by “the best-

“Mid-Channel”

natured fellow living” to a lady of whose first and only serious deflection he knows himself to have been the cause! It must have made a good many people in last night’s audience recoil; and, crediting the author with whatever high purpose one can think of in writing the play, we cannot but feel that the shock was an unnecessary one. And this Ferris is by way of being a “cultured” person, fond of his stall at the opera. How Mozart must have bored him!

What does it all mean? Is the play an argument against the unnatural limitation of marriage responsibilities and consequences, or a warning to husbands to be gentle and to wives not to be too exacting as middle-age draws near? If it is either of these things, we cannot but feel that it suffers from its lack of urbanity. It reminds us of those old-fashioned sermons that sought to lead people to Heaven by depicting the terrors of Hell. And it has great “richness” of language. God is referred to again and again. “Hell!” abounds, and the heroine is almost as free with her “Damns” as the gentlemen of the play—and they are very free indeed. As to the author’s craftsmanship in construction, it is as apparent as ever, notably in the second act, which is remarkably adroit, though the first proved the most popular with the First-Night audience, probably because it is the least harrowing. But the more we try to discover why Sir Arthur Pinero should have troubled to delineate

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such a crew of people, the farther we seem to get from any solution of the problem ; and all we can say is that a great deal of care appears to have been expended upon utterly undeserving material.

Consequently, although the author was well received at the end of the evening, the success of the occasion was Miss Irene Vanbrugh's. Her Zöe Blundell is as finished and nervous a piece of work as she has given us—at one moment all sparkle and charm, at the next tearful and almost tear-compelling, and always magnetic and attractive. Mr. Lyn Harding played the part of the husband with a conscientious heaviness which doubtless fulfilled the author's intentions, but left it a little surprising that there should ever have been a period—and it seems to have lasted for several years—when he and his wife were almost riotously happy. Mr. Eric Maturin emphasised the ill-breeding and native viciousness of Lennie Ferris in a way that was also, doubtless, intended, and did it so well that it will be a relief one day to see him in a rôle more sympathetic. And Mr. Charles Lowne brought all his tact and good humour to bear upon the part of the somewhat platitudinous Mr. Mottram, who, by the way, expounds the meaning of the play's curious title. The reference is to the shoal in the Channel known as the Ridge, midway between Folkestone and Boulogne, where the water is generally rough, and which, once safely

“*Mid-Channel*”

passed, leaves the remainder of the voyage peaceful and calm. The Blundells have reached the Ridge in their lives, and have allowed its waves to overwhelm them. Miss Rosalie Toller, as Ethel Pierpoint, made a charming and vivid figure of the latest of the dramatist's “nice” girls ; and Miss Kate Serjeantson impersonated her mamma with due aplomb ; but Miss Nina Sevening's effort to lend Mrs. Annerly a permanent sneer in the one scene in which she appears was not particularly convincing. The author, by the way, has filled out this last-mentioned part with a series of masterly little touches.

"PRESERVING MR. PANMURE"

*The Comedy Theatre,
January 19th, 1911.*

SIR ARTHUR PINERO describes his piece, "Preserving Mr. Panmure," as "a comic play in four acts." And undoubtedly there are comic possibilities in its principal situation—the seeming-sanctimonious master of a house kissing his daughter's governess, and the four other gentlemen staying under his roof being suspected of the misdemeanour by their wives, fiancée, or hostess. Needless to add, the dramatist pieces his story together very neatly, and contrives to work a good deal of "character" of one kind and another into the picture. Unfortunately, however, nearly all of it is too disagreeable to be good company. Notwithstanding its comic basis, "Preserving Mr. Panmure" contains several characters which might have stepped bodily out of or into the author's recent studies of the morbid. Mr. Panmure himself, for example, is the physically, morally, and intellectually degraded old husband of a very pietist though, at the same time, lovable young wife. The kiss

"Preserving Mr. Panmure"

he gives to the cheerful little governess, Josepha Quarendon, is really too ugly an incident to be comic ; and his reviling of her when he appears to have been found out, and his final hypocritical repentance, are in harmony with it. His wife's only fault is her excessive religiosity, demanding daily morning and evening prayer for the whole household, and sermons twice a week from her impostor of a husband. Mrs. Panmure's unmarried sister, Dulcie, is presented as a strangely ill-bred and ill-tempered person, with a fiancé, one Hugh Loring, who is apparently an idiot. When Dulcie suddenly suspects that it is he who has been kissing Josepha, she cries : " I'm thirty-two, and he may be my last chance, so if I catch him fooling around I'll wring his neck ! " Two other visitors in the house are the Right Hon. Reginald Stulkeley, M.P., gentlemanly and stodgy, and his relative, Talbot Woodhouse, who acts as his private secretary, and is best summed up as a nondescript. Several times during the evening Josepha herself left us in doubt as to whether she was not a designing little minx ; but we fancy now, as we look back on it all, that the author means to portray her as rather a dear. Minx or duck, she becomes engaged to Stulkeley in the end ; and perhaps part of the " comic " character of the play is the fact that she does so without having shown that she has a particle of real affection for him.

Such are the people over whom Sir Arthur

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Pinero invites us to laugh, and we regret to have to say that we found the task a little difficult. The crew in the first three acts of "Preserving Mr. Panmure" are for the most part busy doing tiresome things, and very economical in saying clever ones; while the "comedy" introduced at the expense of the Hagiology in general and St. Polycarp in particular, and the chatter about a Guild of Pure Souls, of which the local curate is president, will surely not suit all tastes. Not until the fourth act was reached, and we got away from the Panmures to Mr. Stulkeley's town-house, and followed a brisk combat between Stulkeley and Talbot for the hand of Josepha, lightened with some amusing business over the drawing of lots out of a narrow jar, did the laughter become general, or take on that hearty ring which tells of an audience that is happy. It has been stated, on what authority we know not, that Sir Arthur Pinero attaches but slight importance to the new play. It certainly struck us as a good deal below the best form of a writer who, in the years gone by, has given us some of the most humorous work in the modern British theatre. It all seemed so much nearer to "Mid-Channel" than to the comic plays of the writer's pre-"Profligate" period.

“JOHN GLAYDE’S HONOUR”

By Mr. Alfred Sutro

*The St. James’s Theatre,
March 2nd, 1907.*

IN “John Glayde’s Honour,” received with unbounded enthusiasm at the St. James’s Theatre, Mr. Alfred Sutro has given us one of the most logical plays of the day. John Glayde, an American husband (credited among other things with always carrying a revolver in his pocket), absents himself practically for years from his young wife Muriel, leaving her to her own devices in Paris, while he piles up his millions in New York. His bank-book is his god. His wife is someone, or something, to be generously financed. *Et voilà tout*. Yet theirs had been a love-match, and he says he loves her still; and when he receives a cable in New York from a certain Lady Lerode, warning him that her son is “painting Mrs. Glayde’s portrait,” and advising him “to come to Paris at once,” he hurries home. On discovering that not only does Trevor Lerode love his wife, but that she loves him, he

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at once asserts his "rights," tells Muriel (not without a touch of condescension) that he regrets his neglect of her and that they will "start afresh" with a new honeymoon, and briefly informs Lerode that his wife's visits to his studio and his visits to her must cease.

In his absorption, however, in Consolidated Stock and High Finance, Glayde has forgotten the strength of a little thing called the passionate love of a man for a woman and of a woman for a man. Trevor and Muriel both oppose him—he with scornful repudiation of any right of the husband, under the circumstances, to interfere; she at first with evasion, and finally with lying words and caresses: and, as soon as she has allayed his suspicions and persuaded him to let her leave for a certain Embassy reception, she flies direct to her lover's studio, from which they are to elope together to Mantes, where they have a cottage, which they have visited "twice before for a couple of days." A few minutes after her departure, Glayde's secretary, Shurmur, a fellow with Indian blood in his veins, faithful and crafty, bursts in upon him and tells him of his wife's flight. He dashes after her to the studio, and confronts her. He appeals to her with every argument he can think of, tender and menacing: but, desperate, and now at bay, her sole response is to glory in the lies she has told him, in her adoration of Lerode, in her guilt—"I belong to him body and soul"—and in her unshakable

“John Glayde’s Honour”

determination to fly with him and never enter her husband’s life again. Presently Lerode himself enters, and at sight of him the wife shrieks, “Trevor, he will kill you!” But Mr. Sutro does not end his play with a bullet. A far finer and truer scene is in store. Mastering himself, Glayde turns to the lover and says :

This woman loves you. She used to be my wife. She loves you beyond anything else—honesty, truth, shame. She has made the greatest of all sacrifices for you—she has lied and betrayed. Take her away. I shall divorce her—you can get married. I shall make provision for her, that she may never want. Take her, and help her—to lie and betray no more.

And without looking at either of them he moves slowly to the door, and goes out. His steps are heard on the stone outside, then the clang of the gate. Neither of the guilty pair stirs. They are tongue-tied and bewildered, and their heads are bowed. On this powerful and original scene the curtain falls.

We have called the play supremely logical, and in doing so we refer particularly to the *dénouement*. John Glayde adopted the only reasonable way out of the *impasse* to which his neglect of his first duty as a husband had brought him. Killing Lerode would have been no final solution of the whole problem that confronted him; neither would killing Muriel, nor killing them both. He realises that, whatever may happen

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now, he has irretrievably lost his wife. Obviously, the best thing to do is to let her go with the man she loves and who has shown that he loves her. Let them live their lives. He still has his High Finance and his Consolidated Stock to fall back upon, and his career is by no means finished. It is also a supremely didactic play. Never has the duty of a husband to make his wife at least as much the subject of his personal devotion as his bank-book been more powerfully enforced on the stage or anywhere else, or the possible consequences of neglect been more ruthlessly and convincingly driven home. "To have and to hold from this day forward . . . to love and to cherish . . . till death us do part" is the solemn obligation which John Glayde, in his pursuit of a fortune, has flung to the winds; and the wife takes the law into her own hands. A nobler way was open to her, but Glayde was an optimist when he expected all the nobility to be on one side. He is punished, but she also will suffer. She has suffered already; and worse, half revealed in the last few moments of the play, lies awaiting her in the future. Indeed, one of the chief proofs of the power of the drama is the way in which the spectator is left, when all is over, wondering as to what will be the after-fate of its three dominant characters.

The play is written in a fine nervous English, sprinkled with wit in the lighter scenes, and distinguished in the stronger by great tact of

"John Glayde's Honour"

omission, leaving nothing in but what "tells" and is to the point. And the performance was for the most part worthy of the play. Mr. George Alexander, as the husband, got inside the character much more completely than is sometimes the case with this very popular actor. Glayde's patient tenderness in his earlier scenes with his wife, the mingled tact and firmness with which he confronts Lerode, and the passionate and varied appeal to Muriel in the final scenes, all showed the actor at his best. Miss Eva Moore, as the wife, played with a charm and a nervous force which were of the highest value. It must be a very exhausting part, for it is a long one, and the moral strain under which the woman is labouring is never for an instant relaxed. Miss Moore rose to every situation, and was at all times in full control of the rapt attention of the house. As the lover, Lerode, Mr. Matheson Lang completed the Triangle. His handsome presence and manly bearing (for this lover is of a very different class from the hang-dog Maurewarde of "His House in Order") lent a charm to every scene in which he appeared, and the devotion of the man to Muriel and his scorn of the husband, whose money could have no power over him, found the most vivid expression. A remarkable piece of character acting came from Mr. Michael Sherbrooke as the semi-Oriental secretary. Nothing could have been more graphic, and the audience gave it special recognition.

A DRAMATIC TREATISE ON STRIKES

By Mr. John Galsworthy

The Duke of York's,
March 9th, 1909.

THE production of "Strife" at the Duke of York's theatre was one of those happy occasions when the combined arts of the dramatist and the actor exercise their spell at its intensest. In writing this play Mr. Galsworthy has not set out merely to amuse. He shows a strike in action; and he reminds us of the fact, known to everyone who has studied these more or less barbarous struggles between labour and capital, that as a rule a little wisdom on either side would have prevented them, and that they nearly always end in a defeat, "moral" or actual, for the operatives. Both in England and America most of the great strikes have ended in the victory of capital. In the case presented by Mr. Galsworthy the struggle ends in a compromise; but if the directors had known five minutes earlier what the audience knew—namely, that the men were



"Camera Portrait" by Hoppé

MR. JOHN GALSWORTHY

A Dramatic Treatise on Strikes

ready to surrender—it would have been a victory for Capital. If, on the other hand, the men had known what the audience knew, that the directors had also decided to throw up the sponge, it would have been a victory for Labour. As things turned out, a struggle that had cost thousands of pounds to the company, and severe privation to the men and their families, ended in a compromise which had been actually formulated before the strike took place at all by the secretary of the company in friendly discussion with an official of the men's trade-union! The whole play thus resolved itself into an ironical yet pitiful comment on the uselessness and worse than uselessness of these conflicts. Such a play obviously may not be much of an entertainment for the mere seeker after amusement; but it may be very useful indeed to the thinking man and woman.

The protagonists in the battle between the directors and men of the Trenartha Tinplate Works are Mr. John Anthony, the chairman, and David Roberts, the leader of the men. Each is blind to everything but the rights and wrongs of his own class. Mr. Anthony is seventy-six, obstinate and grim. He has been fighting against Labour for half a century, and has never given way to what he considers its extravagant demands. He has his own standard of fairness, and will not deflect a hair's-breadth from it, though his men be hungry and their wives and children dying.

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He despises the “softness” capable of being swayed by a puling humanitarianism. He sees a good deal of it in modern England, and considers it a sign of national degeneracy. He regards himself as the champion of the wealthy class of the future as well as of that of to-day. “Times may have changed,” he growls, “I have not. To say that masters and men are equal is cant—that capital and labour have the same interests, cant ! Masters are masters, and men are men !” The practical uselessness of such a person in a conflict of this kind may be imagined easily enough.

The man Roberts is just as sincere, and just as impracticable. To begin with, he has a grievance ; an invention of his has resulted in profits of over £100,000 for the firm, and the amount paid to him in the form of a couple of bonuses has been a beggarly £700. And, brooding over this and the wrongs and miseries of the working classes in general, he has become a tragic lunatic—forbidding the wife he loves to have children, because he will not be responsible for bringing any more helpless creatures into so hard a world ; seeing her starve and die while he uses his eloquence to keep the strike going, and devotes all his own money to the cause of the men ; laughing bitterly at the teachings of “Chapel” and a God who befriends employers ; “seeing red” everywhere ; a bundle of contradictory extremes—incarnate hate, altruism, selfishness, intelligence, and stupidity. Both Mr. Anthony

A Dramatic Treatise on Strikes

and Roberts are impressive figures ; and, impersonated respectively with the finest skill by Mr. Norman McKinnel and Mr. J. Fisher White, they stir the imagination strangely.

With a realistic art that is yet always dramatic, Mr. Galsworthy shows us a meeting of the directors, with its opposed types, some of them comic, others shrewd in a narrow way ; the poverty-stricken cottage of the labour leader, with his wife dying by the wretched fire, and her women friends coming in, hungry themselves, to cheer her up as best they may ; and a meeting of the men outside the works, with speaker after speaker swaying them now this way now that. In all, assisted by brilliant acting, he holds the audience riveted. One wonderful touch in the dreary cottage scene is the entry of a little boy, who sits on a chair not far from the dying woman, and amuses himself in his dull way from time to time by playing tunes on a tin-whistle. Another is the passionate embrace the woman gives the child when he is leaving her, a poignant outburst of the mother-passion which her semi-insane husband has suppressed. A third is a scene in which that same husband, kneeling before her, distressed at her appearance, and yet scarcely capable of thinking clearly of anything but the men and their wrongs, murmurs words of impassioned tenderness. And in the last act there is a scene between Mr. Anthony's daughter and a young woman, the betrothed of one of the

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men, who has been rendered a savage by what she is suffering, in which the utter misunderstanding of the one class by the other is illustrated in masterly fashion. But, really, the whole play is compact of fine moments. One notable feature that must be insisted on, however, is the author's pitifulness. "Poor, stupid Anthony! Poor, mad Roberts!" he seems to say. "Poor puppets, in this little drama of rich directors and wretched cottagers, with the snow-clad hills of Wales as a background!" A play that conveys such an impression as that is, surely, on a very high level of dramatic art.

As to the acting, we have referred briefly to the two chief performances; but there was not a part in the long cast that was not played with a truth, sureness, and delicacy of touch worthy of the highest praise. Every one deserved congratulation; and not least Mr. Granville Barker, whose stage-management of the play showed that attention to detail and also to broad effect which did so much to make the Court Theatre what it was in the Vedrenne-Barker days.

“ JUSTICE ”

The Duke of York's,
February 21st, 1910.

THE Duke of York's Theatre inaugurated its career as a Repertory House, under the management of Mr. Charles Frohman, with the production of Mr. John Galsworthy's new play, "Justice," called by the author "a tragedy in four acts." The work is in prose, deals with modern life, and is acted with perfect realism and no approach whatever to stage effect. For all that, it is as truly a tragedy as anything the Elizabethans ever gave us—a tragedy of Law that is deliberately unjust to a woman and unwittingly unjust to a man, and of a prison-system worse than bestial in its stupid cruelty. Those who have read the "De Profundis" of Oscar Wilde may remember the pages in which he speaks of "the plank bed, the loathsome food, the hard ropes shredded into oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain, the harsh orders that routine seems to necessitate, the dreadful dress that makes sorrow grotesque to look at, the silence, the solitude, the shame . . . the immobile quality that makes each dreadful day in

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the very minutest detail like its brother," and the punishment which society goes on inflicting after the official "sentence" has been worked out. In Mr. Galsworthy's play the man who has to suffer these things has earned them by a deed more beautiful than base. For the sake of an unhappy woman whom he loves, he has forged a cheque; and the Law, stern, majestic, and impartial, converts him into a drifting criminal, and grinds him to death.

Let us briefly tell the story. William Falder, a lawyer's clerk, twenty-three years old, has fallen in love with Ruth Honeywill, married to a drunken ruffian, and the mother of two young children; and she is in love with him. Her husband one morning tries to strangle her, but she escapes, rushes to her friend's lodgings, and tells him what has happened. An emotional young fellow, he is terrified at the sight of her bruised neck, torn dress, and bloodshot eyes. Then he weeps at his own helplessness. If only he had the money he would take her and her children away to South America, and deliver her from the brute who is destroying her! And, that very day, at the office, the temptation comes to him. He is sent to cash a cheque for £9 for the firm, alters the amount to £90, hands the necessary money to Mrs. Honeywill to get the children's outfit, secures the tickets and makes arrangements for the flight. Then comes discovery, arrest, trial, and sentence to three years'

“Justice”

penal servitude. The “separate system” in prison drives him nearly out of his mind; and when at last he is discharged the ticket-of-leave regulations prevent him getting steady employment. He forges a reference—is found out again—and, on the verge of re-arrest, commits suicide. Ruth in the meanwhile has tried living with her husband again, but left him when he took to beating not her alone but also the children. She has finally been driven to accept the “protection” of her employer in a dressmaking establishment; but she comes across Falder again—in time to see him lying dead. Her own fate and that of her children remain untold.

Narrated and enacted with notable power, it is a terrifying story. All seems so horribly true, so hideously inevitable, so brutally silly. Falder was the very opposite to a criminal at heart—but he forged, so he had to pay the penalty. Ruth Honeywill was tied to a brute, but could not divorce him because his cruelty only took one form—that of physical assault. A well-meaning but weak young man, whose chief fault is that he thinks with his emotions, is dealt with by the Law precisely as a strong-willed and callous criminal would have been. And the same Law, instead of freeing a woman from a savage husband’s tyranny, helps to drive her into what the world calls, and what *she* feels to be, “a life of shame.” Falder’s trial is shown. It fills the second act. His counsel endeavours to prove that

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the forgery was committed in a moment of such violent emotional excitement as to amount to temporary madness ; and he does prove it. But, even as we listen to him, we know that there can be only one verdict—Guilty. Says the barrister to the jury :

Once this cheque was altered and presented, the work of four minutes—four mad minutes—the rest has been silence. But in these four minutes the boy before you has slipped through a door, hardly opened, into that great cage which never again quite lets a man go—the cage of the Law. His further acts, his failure to confess, the alteration of the counterfoil, his preparations for flight, are all evidence—not of deliberate and guilty intention when he committed the prime act from which these subsequent acts arose ; no—they are merely evidence of the weak character which is clearly enough his misfortune. But is a man to be lost because he is born and bred with a weak character ? Gentlemen, men like the defendant are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, *patients, and not criminals.*

Mr. Galsworthy's play is a plea for more enlightenment, more sympathetic intelligence in the office, in the court-house, and in the prison. It is an indictment of the Law. It is also an indictment of Society. In each case there is an answer to it ; but we know of none that quite overthrows the indictment. Indeed, the best reply we can think of is the fact that the spirit of intelligence for which the dramatist appeals *is*

“ Justice ”

beginning to make itself felt throughout the community in such cases as those of William Falder and Ruth Honeywill.

Mr. Dennis Eadie, as Falder, gave one of his most polished performances. It did not seem acting at all, but real life ; and the wistful, kindly face, quiet voice, and boyish physique made a haunting figure. Praise of the highest is also due to the Ruth Honeywill of Miss Edyth Olive, the pathetic complement of her ill-fated lover. The stage-management of the court scene was masterly, and resulted in as perfect an illusion as a theatre can well give. For this, acknowledgments are due to that accomplished “ producer ” of plays, Mr. Granville Barker.

A TRIPLE BILL

By George Meredith and J. M. Barrie

The Duke of York's,
March 1st, 1910.

Two little masterpieces by Mr. Barrie, and a fragment that must read, if it does not act, like a masterpiece, by George Meredith—what more could playgoer desire? The vivid art of a living master and the wayward grace of a dead one. It is long since a London audience found itself listening with so strained an intensity as that which the crowded house at the Duke of York's Theatre bestowed on the two scenes of "The Sentimentalists."

However, let us take the programme in its own order, and begin with Mr. Barrie's little tragedy. "Old Friends" tells the story of a man, Stephen Brand, who has formerly been a dipsomaniac, but has shaken off the habit completely. He has been married for seventeen or eighteen years, and has a daughter who is his darling, and is just engaged to be married. For twelve years he has not touched alcohol; all desire for it is dead. His wife, and his friend Carroll, a clergyman, are

A Triple Bill

the only living souls who share with him the secret of his past ; and the wife had helped him to conquer his vice. So far so good. But as Stephen chats by the fire in his sitting-room, late at night, with his friend, wife and child having gone to bed, he blurts forth a strange thing. Shadows have been about him lately. He has seen them—*heard them*—moving in the next room as he has lain in his bed, wide awake. Are they the shadows of dead sins ? His friend says “No,” cheers him as best he may, and at last returns to his rectory. Left alone, Stephen locks the doors, turns out the light, and enters his bedroom ; then returns to the dark sitting-room, and throws himself wearily into a chair by the fire. In a few moments a door at the top of a flight of stairs opens stealthily, a white-shrouded figure appears, slowly and silently makes its way down, and approaches a little cabinet in which the whisky and brandy are kept. The mysterious shadows have materialised, and Stephen Brand, starting from his chair, sees his own child furtively trying to get at the decanters. A horror beyond words possesses him, an agony of remorse. He questions her ; and she lies to him—just as he had been wont to lie in the time of his own abasement. Then the wife comes down. She has discovered the girl’s malady, and has had her sleeping with her for security’s sake. When she realises that now the father also knows what has happened, she turns on him and reviles him for

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“the legacy” he has given their child. “But I broke myself of the habit!” cries the wretched man, seeing a ray of hope. “Never!” is the wife’s bitter reply. “The habit *left* you. It had worn you out. You could entertain it no more, and it left you! Our vices *leave us*—we don’t drive them away.” And their consequences remain—shadows that speak. Old sins have become “Old Friends.”

It is a ghastly story; and Mr. Barrie illustrates it with every circumstance of horror. We can recall few things more harrowing in a theatre. But for all that, the wife’s theory of her husband’s redemption is as false as it is cruel. No one who has ever read or listened to the story of a drunkard’s conquest of his vice, and has realised the nature of the struggle—the sleepless nights, for instance, in which the mere sound of the wheels of a passing carriage in the street below will set every nerve in the body aching in agony—will deny the very highest courage to the victor. Mr. Barrie’s theory is pessimistic, and, as we have said, we believe it to be false. As a play, however, acted with great sincerity and skill by Mr. Sydney Valentine as the husband, Miss Lena Ashwell as the wife, Miss Dorothy Minto as the daughter, and Mr. Hubert Harben as the clergyman, “Old Friends” fascinated the house.

Then came the Meredithian fragment, two scenes of a comedy called “The Sentimental-

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ists," with people in Early Victorian costumes wandering, talking, in a charming old garden. Of plot we could detect little, save that a lovely lady, Astræa, widow of the great and venerable Professor Towers, is the chief of the little group of transcendental admirers of one Professor Spiral, who talks very transcendently indeed, but appears to have a keen eye on the widow's fortune ; and that a manly young fellow, Arden by name, who is not transcendental at all, loves the widow for herself, and wins a faint prospect of her hand. What Meredith would have made of it as a play we cannot guess ; but its fastidiousness of phrasing was manifest enough. Sentence after sentence, beautifully polished and packed with the dry wisdom and the dainty humour of the Master, fell on the ear with a quite inexpressible effect of charm. Torn from their context they would miss something of their effect, so we shall refrain from quoting. Of dramatic action there was very little, particularly in the second scene, which dragged as drama, but interested as talk. Again, however, we had some rarely finished acting, particularly from Mr. Dennis Eadie as the heroine's wise uncle ; Miss Mary Jerrold as an agreeable feminine rattle, Lyra by name ; and Miss Fay Davis as Astræa, a lady prone to very long speeches, and with a most diverting habit of pausing gravely and composedly between the sentences, as though to allow her wisdom to sink in.

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Thirdly and lastly came the comedietta. "The Twelve-Pound Look," of which the essential story can be told briefly. Harry Sim, middle-aged, vulgar, aggressive, and enormously wealthy (probably by the sale of tape or buttons: the source of his riches is not revealed), is about to be knighted, and is rehearsing his part in the ceremony to his wife, a subdued creature, beautiful but lifeless. She is his second wife, her predecessor having run away and been divorced some years before. A typist is engaged to write letters of thanks for congratulations; and when she appears and Harry sees her, lo and behold, Sim's first wife! Alone with him, she informs him that she did not leave him for the sake of any other man, but simply to be rid of him. His selfishness and luxury were suffocating her; so, in desperation, she learned typewriting, saved twelve pounds, bought a typewriter, ran away and let herself be divorced. "And I can see that you are treating your present wife as you treated me. But I warn you, Harry. Watch her! Look out for the Twelve-pound Look!" "Out of my house!" roars the enraged plutocrat. "My wife is the happiest of women!"—and the typist shrugs her shoulders and retires, smiling faintly. And when the "happiest of women" re-enters the gorgeous reception-room, and finds her lord and master alternating between surliness and lavish generosity, there presently comes into her eyes a

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strange, searching expression ; and after a little while she says, half to herself and half to her husband : “ What do those things cost ? ” “ What things ? ” snaps the great man. “ Those typewriters ? ” Unsuspiciously, he tells her, and she drifts slowly away ; but as she vanishes an idea strikes him. Then the awful truth breaks upon him ; and he stands gorgonised from head to foot. Curtain. A Barrie joke of the first water ; and once more the audience has been fascinated, but in the pleasantest of ways this time ; and the cheers that broke out at the finish showed the delight of the house. Mr. Edmund Gwenn as the husband, Miss Lena Ashwell as the typist, and Miss Mary Barton as the wife played their parts to perfection ; and the audience left the theatre in a condition of great beatitude.

"AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME"

By Major du Maurier

*Wyndham's,
January 27th, 1909.*

LORD ROBERTS has at last found a powerful aid in—a playhouse ! The drama, "An Englishman's Home," produced with overwhelming success at Wyndham's Theatre, is remarkable not only as a piece of dramatic technique, but also as an appeal to masses of the men and women of this country to have done with nonsense, to take life seriously, and to make their patriotism a thing of service and not of the lips. It presents with the most vivid realism a picture of an England invaded by a foreign army, which, under cover of a fog, has crossed the North Sea and landed in Essex. These stalwart strangers are the troops of "Her Imperial Majesty the Empress of the North," and are led by a blond-bearded Prince Yoland. The scene of the play is a room in Myrtle Villa, Wickham, the residence of a Mr. Brown. The father of a family of grown-up young people, Mr. Brown is an easy-going citizen who, having made his pile, has

"An Englishman's Home"

apparently retired from business. Fond of "diabolo" and for ever practising it, he is also rather proud of the sporting enthusiasms of his children and their friends, and inclined to discourage the military spirit of his daughter Maggie's admirer, Paul Robinson, a volunteer. His daughter Maggie's intelligence can hardly be said to have been awakened; his other daughter, Amy, is a common, shallow, giggling idiot; and his son Reggie is devoted to "sport" and "Limerick competitions." Their friend, Geoffrey Smith is absorbed in football, racing, and the "halfpenny sporting Press," though, seemingly, he has never got nearer to being a sportsman than on one memorable afternoon when he shot three sea-gulls—"one of them flying!" He considers volunteering a mug's game. He "works hard" in his office for eight hours a day, staring at the blotting-paper, or looking through a dirty window; and when his "work" is over he requires relaxation. And he is a real patriot, too! Didn't he get drunk on Mafeking night, and fall into one of the basins in Trafalgar Square, and have to be fished out by a policeman? Bless you, there's not much the matter with Geoff. Smith. And when the enemy appear, out of the fog, and Myrtle Villa, as a stoutly built house in its own grounds and on a hill, is converted into a fort by the local volunteers, and firing commences, our gallant Geoff., joking and guffawing over the

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“barney” that has just begun, mounts a table the better to see the fun, gets a foreign bullet through his heart, and tumbles to the floor dead. And so no more of Geoffrey Smith, humorist, sportsman, and patriot!

Nor, with the exception of Paul Robinson, do the rest of the Brown circle make any better show. Brown *père* can only order the foreigners out of his house and off his lawn; and, when they politely refuse to budge, and laugh at his reminder that an Englishman's house is his castle, he can only fly into a worse fury and curse them. Maggie finds herself unable to be of the slightest assistance to a wounded man who is bleeding to death; Amy goes out of her mind; and Reggie runs away in terror to find shelter in the house of an aunt. In the last act the roof of Myrtle Villa is on fire. There are great holes in the walls. Glass and pictures are in ruins. The enemy are drawing nearer and nearer, and the order is given to the volunteers to retire. “Cowards!” shouts Brown *père* as they scurry away, leaving him alone amid the wreckage. Then, the man who, when first we met him, was for ever playing “diabolo,” seizes a rifle, tries desperately to use it, fails several times, but at last succeeds, and is “bringing down” the enemy one by one, until the room is rushed, and Prince Yoland, after a few formal questions and answers, orders him to be led out and shot on his own lawn as a civilian

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who has taken up arms against the invaders. His daughter’s shriek follows the rattle of his execution; and so no more of Brown *père*, quiet, humanitarian, “diabolo”-playing member of an Imperial race.

The play, however, does not end in horror and ruin. With a concession to popular sentiment which may be false to all that has gone before, but which will serve the useful purpose of drawing the public, the pipes of Highlanders are heard in the distance, just before the curtain falls; Prince Yoland starts and seizes his revolver a little desperately; and a moment later he and his officers are surrounded by British troops. The effect of this *dénouement* on the First Night’s audience was tremendous; and after the curtain had finally fallen the cheering went on as though it would never stop. Indeed, it had been the same after each of the other two acts; and if the author, Major Du Maurier, had appeared he would have had a reception to remember. The drama is the work not only of a patriot but also of a real dramatist. Putting its patriotic message altogether on one side, it has all the virtues of a good play—natural and easy dialogue, faithful and consistent delineations of character, a happy mixture of light and shadow, and a keen sense of situation and of climax. In the second act there were patriotic speeches from Paul Robinson that brought down roars of cheers, and yet that rang sincerely and were not mere

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clap-trap ; and the same applies to a speech the Captain of Fusiliers has in the last act, in which he pours scorn on poor Brown *père*, who has been prating patriotism all his life and has practised it so little.

The picture of national unreadiness is really ghastly, though some of it—particularly the figure of a certain Captain Finch, of the volunteers—is in comic terms. The captain knows little more of war than a cat, and gives orders he does not understand and withdraws them the next moment. His courage and that of most of his men is nullified by their ignorance and stupidity. A doctor is called in to attend to the wounded and dying, but he is “not prepared,” has no appliances, and is compelled to retire. There are no stretchers ; and the men have no idea of taking cover. “How dare you come here and attack harmless men ?” cries Geoff. to the Prince in the second act. “*In the country I come from no men are harmless,*” came the grim reply. From the moment that line was spoken the audience began to take the play seriously. Up to that point they had not quite made up their minds whether it was farce or tragedy. As a matter of fact, it is neither the one nor the other, but only an impassioned appeal to the national spirit, expressed in terms of almost irresistible power. The author of “An Englishman’s Home” has certainly performed a valuable patriotic service.

"An Englishman's Home"

It was splendidly acted. Mr. Charles Rock was Brown *père* to the life, and displayed great power in the final scene; Mr. Lawrence Gros-smith brought out all the vulgarity and pusillanimity of Geoffrey Smith with a comic force that often sent waves of laughter over the house, even while the dismal truth of the type was being most forcibly realised; and Mr. Arthur Wontner touched with manliness, and even with something of tragic beauty, the character of the brave young volunteer, Paul Robinson. Mr. E. W. Garden, as the utterly useless volunteer captain, caused great laughter. This figure, indeed, is really a caricature, for no volunteer officer of any standing at all would be such a donkey in a time of emergency. Perhaps the author exaggerated the figure intentionally for the sake of providing comic relief. If so, he has been unfair. Mr. Edmund Maurice as Prince Yoland, and Mr. Rudge Harding as the Captain of Fusiliers, gave vivid little sketches of character; and Miss Elaine Inescort as Maggie Brown, Miss Mona Harrison as Amy, and Miss Christine Silver as their friend, Ada Jones, hit off the peculiarities of three silly girls with no little skill. Indeed, the memories of Maggie's shriek and of Amy's pale, terror-maddened face, in the last act are among the most vivid we brought away from an evening that was a steady crescendo of excitement.

"THE PASSING OF THE THIRD-FLOOR-BACK"

By Mr. Jerome K. Jerome

*The St. James's,
September 1st, 1908.*

INTO the heart of this modern London of ours, with its pomp and wealth, its hard power, its cynicism (often the last refuge of dying humour), and its all-raging and deadening materialism (the worst enemy of every art), has come, in "The Passing of The Third-Floor-Back," by Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, a drama so strange and so daring that it is certain to be one of the most-discussed plays of the time. The audience that crowded the St. James's Theatre for its first performance received it with boisterous applause at the finish of every act, and the calls for the chief player were repeated and enthusiastic. In any play it would be good to have Mr. Forbes Robertson back again. In a work for the most part so entertaining, so original, and so healthily didactic the benefit is multiplied fifty-fold.

The scene is the drawing-room of a Bloomsbury

" *Passing of the Third-Floor-Back* "

boarding-house ; and the boarders are as disagreeable a set of people as it is possible to conceive. A squabbling major and his wife are trying to get their handsome young daughter married to a rich, old, retired bookmaker, socially impossible, and morally a satyr. A painted and powdered young lady of forty, with dyed hair, jabbars bitter scandal, and steals the piano candles for her bedroom. A disreputable Israelite tries to persuade people to invest in a silver mine which does not exist. A young painter of genius is sacrificing his ideals, and painting coarse pictures of the nude because he can sell them. Another young man bribes the maid with vile intent, and the young woman takes the bribe and appears ready to accept the consequences. The landlady is a cheat, overcharging in her bills, watering the milk, disguising decayed veal as a curry for dinner, and generally getting as much as she can out of her wretched victims at the smallest possible cost to herself. "What's the use of us?" cries the drab little maid-of-all-work, with a flash of insight. "What use are we?" They certainly seem a fairly futile crowd.

Suddenly, however, three taps are heard at the hall door, and the landlady and the maid stand still. They have never heard that sort of knock before. Presently the three taps are repeated, and the girl shuffles into the hall. When she returns there is a smile on her face, not untouched with awe. A stranger has come,

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about a room—such a man as she has never seen before. She retires again and shows him in. His face is of a singular gravity, his manner is gracious, humble, and kind. He relieves the maid of a heavy tray of tumblers, and carries them into the next room for her ; he does not sit until the landlady also is seated ; he agrees amiably to the rent demanded ; and he tells her with a smile that she is “one of the kind women of the world.” The landlady is shaken to her moral centre. The maid creeps away to her work with wide-open eyes bent upon the strange visitor.

Such is the story of the first act. The other two show the Stranger gradually converting all the disreputables into decent men and women ; and when the play has finished and he has passed into the night again, the landlady has become amiable and just ; the major and his wife are lovers again ; the old bookmaker has surrendered his horrible claim to their daughter, and is commissioning the young artist to paint portraits for him so that he and the girl (who love one another) may marry at once ; the vulgar Jew has become a dignified and honest son of Israel, and publicly announces that he has converted his silver mine into a dairy farm ; the painted and dyed “kitten” has abandoned her rouge, her flashy frocks, and her “caustic” conversation ; and of all the pleasant companies of human creatures in Bloomsbury there is none

"*Passing of the Third-Floor-Back*"

so agreeable and so lovable as this. And how has it been done? The Stranger's method is simplicity itself. He sees nothing but good in all the drab little crowd, nothing but beauty in all their seeming ugliness. He credits them all with altruism and philanthropy. He speaks like a Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed orator, and looks like a saint. Suddenly—in a scene which is one of the strangest we have seen in a theatre, and which the audience followed in a rapt stillness—one of the women, the beautiful daughter, left alone with him, recognises Him and falls upon her knees. Yes. "*The Passing of the Third-Floor-Back*" is certainly a play to be talked about.

Viewed as a piece of dramatic art, or even of literary art, it is far from perfect. The unvaried way in which the characters are successfully dealt with by the Stranger becomes at last a little monotonous; and the interest is imperilled in the last act by the prolonged domination of the scene by the chief character, whose utterances become at last almost an excess of sweetness. The further fact that much of what he says is truismatic also makes for danger, though probably that was inevitable. The joy of giving, the beauty of sacrifice, the duty of helping others—these are his theme. Perhaps in the third act, which occasionally hung fire, the author would have done better had he given us a little more drama and a little less sermon.

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The repetition of the Beatitudes became at last a little excessive. The final picture, however, was a haunting one: the drab Bloomsbury "salon" with its lamps out, but through the fanlight over the hall door a stream of silver radiance pouring in across the hall and the room. As the curtain fell on the empty room, one pictured the Stranger walking along a street bathed in the moonlight, and seemed to hear those three taps again at another door, a little farther on.

Every one who has seen Mr. Forbes Robertson can imagine how beautifully he looked and played the part of the Stranger: it was a supreme triumph of personality, and a fine piece of art. Miss Gertrude Elliott, as the maid, accommodated her natural refinements of appearance and diction to the manners and diction of a poor little "slavey" with much skill; and Mr. Hendrie as the old bookmaker, Mr. Edward Sass as the Jew, Mr. Ian Robertson as the Major, Miss Haidée Wright as the painted woman, and Miss Agnes Thomas as the landlady, all did notable work. As we have said, the reception of the whole was very enthusiastic; and had Mr. Jerome appeared he would have had a fine welcome. It is curious that such a play should come from a writer who has hitherto given us little more than "broad grins."

“ KING LEAR ”

*The Haymarket,
September 8th, 1909.*

NOT for the first time in its history, the Haymarket Theatre reverted to Tragedy with Mr. Herbert Trench's revival of "King Lear." Nearly eighty years ago Edmund Kean, with genius no longer traceable in his bloated face, and so crippled with gout that he used his sword as a stick, played Richard there, and, by bursts, was as grand as he had ever been ; and a little later Macready played Othello on the same stage, and found that the audience " did not seem to be of the same quality of intellect as I had been used to at Covent Garden." Mr. Trench has inaugurated his management with a revival which every lover of Shakspeare may go to see without fear of being offended. " King Lear " has not often been acted in London of late years. We recall Salvini in it at Covent Garden, and can see him still as he broke a branch from a tree, and, holding it as though it were a sceptre, pealed forth his " Aye, every inch a king ! " We remember Edwin Booth playing it at the Princess's, to a house that seemed only half full,

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and did not seem nearly half-dusted ; and the memory of his look and tone at the words, "To deal plainly, I fear I am not in my perfect mind," in the tent scene with Cordelia, abides with us yet, as that of one of the most touching pieces of acting we have ever witnessed. And we saw Henry Irving in it at the Lyceum—and those who had not that privilege have only to look at some of the beautiful drawings Mr. Bernard Partridge made of him in the character to realise what a figure he presented.

As a spectacle, this Haymarket revival was incomparably finer than those in which Salvini and Booth figured, and, albeit on far simpler lines, very nearly as impressive as Irving's. Indeed, the rough-hewn, massive palace interiors and exteriors ; the Heath, with its vast monoliths of pre-Christian ecclesiastical architecture ; and the Dover cliff, lit by the setting sun, were pictures designed by an imaginative artist, and are not likely to be forgotten. The acting version is, of course, a good deal shorter than the original, and twenty-six scenes have been reduced to thirteen. As a result, the play finished in good time, but at moments the story suffered, and the loss, here and there, of some noble verse—as, for instance, the thrilling speech commencing "Poor naked wretches"—was also felt. Nor are we sure that the retention of that scene of "bestial callousness"—the phrase is Mr. Trench's own—depicting the taking-out of

“*King Lear*”

Gloucester's eyes, is advisable. It is not worthy of Shakspeare, and it sent a thrill of horror through the audience. Indeed, it had such an effect upon one spectator in our neighbourhood that we heard the question agitatedly asked of a gentleman in the row in front, “Is there any more of that sort of thing? Do they do anything like that to Lear?” Only on receiving a comforting reply in the negative did that spectator decide to remain to the end! One thing which struck us very much was the effect created by the scene in the hovel. It is, of course, a wonderful scene to read; but one might easily imagine that, on the stage, the speculations of the distraught king, the ravings of Edgar, and the twitterings of the Fool would prove undramatic. At the Haymarket this scene was followed with as much interest as any in the play, and the applause at the finish of it was prolonged. Such was the effect of some exceedingly imaginative acting.

To come to individual performances, the King of Mr. Norman McKinnel demands, of course, first consideration. In make-up and bearing, his Lear, when first we met him, was hale and robust, and, so far as appearances go, his mind was as sound as his body. The eye was steady; the hands could keep still; the voice was under control. At Cordelia's refusal to heave her heart into her mouth, anger blazed up, but it was not an insane anger, and the old man was still per-

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fectly capable of a cool summary of the situation. Even the subsequent discovery of the heartlessness of Goneril brought no sign of mental overthrow. The Curse was glided into, as it were, quite calmly, and without a pause; the exit at the close of it was hurried, but not feverish; the return, and the second outburst, still suggested a measure of self-command. It was not until after the scene with the two daughters together that the change took place, and it was shown by a striking piece of acting—a sudden look of haggard anguish, a moment's wildly staring silence, then almost a collapse, and the words, gasped out with difficulty, "O Fool, I shall go mad!"

Thenceforward the impersonation was quiet and often pathetic, though now and then it fell disappointingly short of its possibilities. Mr. McKinnel might, for instance, have made much more of the cry, "I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness," and of "I am a man more sinned against than sinning," though the recognition of Cordelia, and the final scene over her corpse, were played with care and effect. We noticed, by the way, that at the line in the latter, "And my poor fool is hang'd!" Mr. McKinnel looked away from his child; and we wondered if he regarded the cry as a reference to some fate which had befallen the Jester. Some students, including Henry Irving, thus read it, though Swinburne and the majority of critics regard it as an allusion to the death Cordelia has just

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suffered. Upon the whole, Mr. McKinnel gave an interesting performance, though not an “inspired” one; and his final reception was most cordial.

Miss Ellen O'Malley was a tender and poetical Cordelia; and the deadly, still malignity of Mr. J. Fisher White's Cornwall, the pathetic Gloucester of Mr. James Hearn, and the Edgar of Mr. Charles Quatermaine, were performances that had beauties on which it is agreeable to muse.

“DON”

The Haymarket,
October 12th, 1909.

MR. RUDOLF BESIER'S comedy, "Don," is the work of a poet rather than of a playwright; but there is freshness of idea in it as well as unconventionality of treatment; and if, now and then, its talk is a little excessive, compensation comes sooner or later in the form of an unanticipated situation or an unexpected little flash of "character." It is not a perfect instance of dramatic technique, but the intellectual dramatist is disposed to be a law to himself so far as construction and dialogue are concerned, and to claim that the only demand we have the right to make of him is that he shall interest us. Mr. Besier certainly achieves that.

His hero is one Stephen Bonington, son of a country clergyman, and, although not yet thirty, "famous as a poet and thinker wherever English is read." His conversation scarcely bears out that description of him—for it contains a good deal of platitude and rather cheap sentimentality,

“Don”

and is amazingly prolix once he gets started ; but, then, famous poets and thinkers have often been very oppressive talkers—so, save on selfish grounds, there is no fault to be found with that. But Stephen does more than talk. He is a compassionate humanist, ever ready to help people in distress, and, in particular, profoundly convinced of the cruelty of social conditions towards women. Accordingly, when he overhears pretty, nervous, ladylike Elizabeth Ellison, a waitress in a tea-shop, insulted, he first thrashes the insulter, and then gets the girl a position as companion to his mother ; and afterwards, when she has married a brutal Plymouth Brother, who is prepared to beat her for the glory of God, he takes her away, spends a night by her bed in a hotel nursing and tending her, and is quite prepared, innocent as he is, to play the part of co-respondent so that she may be free. He does not even object to being shot by the infuriated Plymouth Brother, for that will secure the ruffian being hanged and will leave Elizabeth at liberty. Such is the hero of “Don”—a name, by the way, given him by his fiancée, Ann Sinclair, as an affectionate epitome of his general quixotry. Of course, in the end, his wisdom, the Higher Wisdom of mercifulness, is vindicated. Elizabeth’s husband softens, and takes her back with some prospect of happiness for them both ; and Stephen is left to be happy with

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his gentle Ann—until his quixotry breaks forth again.

Such is Mr. Besier's story—and a very pretty story it is. The dramatist, however, does not make us feel that it is a true story ; and after all, that is a fault in a comedy which is not labelled fantastic. For instance, he lets Stephen bring Elizabeth into the presence of his father, his mother, his fiancée, and her parents—all of whom are aware of the alleged compromising flight—without a word of explanation. Not until the middle of the second act does he explain his conduct. In real life he would have done it immediately, for the sake of everybody concerned. Then again, Mr. Besier himself seems to lack respect for his own creation, for, at the end of the second act, the curtain falls on the comic spectacle of three women—his mother, his fiancée, and Elizabeth—clinging to Stephen with screams and gasps of terror, struggling to prevent him from going into the next room to meet the angry Plymouth Brother. The effect of that is to make him look rather ridiculous ; and, for that reason, although there is nothing improbable in the scene, we are not at all sure that it is good art. Neither, surely, is it good art, or true to life, to present the parents of the charming Ann as a very silly General and a very ill-bred lady, both of whom freely insult their hosts, the vicar and his wife, the one by his abuse and the other by her laughter.

“Don”

It was not until the last act that “Don” really gripped the audience; and then it was the figure of the Plymouth Brother that suddenly rendered the play vital, with his grim face, husky voice, abominable clothes, ferocious uxoriousness, and equally ferocious piety. “Fallin’ in love with ’er,” he growls, “was like bein’ saved over again. It was the dazzle o’ Gawd in me eyes!” Here, at all events, was a figure that lived—queer, ugly, and forbidding, yet no phantom, but something of flesh and blood. There had been beautiful moments in the two earlier acts, particularly one towards the end of the second, in which Stephen declared to Ann that it was only his love for her that had prompted him to do what he had done for Elizabeth. But it was the sombre moments of the third act that made “Don” a success.

The acting was perfect. Mr. Charles Quartermaine made Stephen as real as an actor could; and Miss Christine Silver gave a most vivid little performance as the hunted, trembling Elizabeth—who, by the way, with another of Mr. Besier’s happier touches, only seems to consent to go back to her husband when she realises that Stephen does not love her and does love someone else. Miss Ellen O’Malley as Ann and Mr. James Hearn as Canon Bonington more than once performed the difficult feat of rendering their characters interesting

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and comprehensible during long spells of silence ; and Mr. Norman McKinnel impersonated the Plymouth Brother with a masterly blend of "realism " and reserve.

“ HENRY VIII ”

*His Majesty's Theatre,
September, 1910.*

WE cannot pay Sir Herbert Tree's production of "Henry VIII," at His Majesty's, a greater compliment on its spectacular side than by saying that both in splendour and taste it equalled the superb revival with which Henry Irving delighted over two hundred audiences at the Lyceum eighteen years ago. It has been said in one or two quarters that the Lyceum production was one of Irving's less expensive revivals. As a matter of fact, it was precisely the opposite, its actual cost, independent of the ordinary working expenses of the theatre, being, as Mr. Brereton reminds us in his "Life of Irving," nearly £12,000. Of that spectacle, and also of Irving's beautiful performance as Wolsey, we have unforgettable memories, and scene after scene of splendour rise before us as we look back on it. At His Majesty's Theatre, eye and ear were once more as charmed as they were then. Each scene, even the briefest and least important, was a delightful picture, and the greater ones—notably those of the hall in

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York Place (which was afterwards Whitehall), of the room in Blackfriars in which the Queen's trial takes place, and of Westminster Abbey, crowded for the coronation of Anne Bullen—were all crowded with detail and beauty. It was a time when colour was coming over from Italy with the Renaissance, and the English Royal interiors were beginning to be gorgeous ; and the painted walls and roofs, rich tapestry effects, and countless charming architectural touches in Sir Herbert Tree's revival, all combined to make a splendid setting for the gaily clad men and women of the Court of England of the period.

The acting version of the play is in the three acts of which Sir Herbert is so fond. Irving played it in the five of the author—or authors—but, at His Majesty's, the whole of the last act of the original was cut out, and the curtain fell finally on the scene of Anne Bullen's coronation. There need be no objection to this. After all, "Henry VIII" is a play which can be cut rather lavishly at small cost. It is very uncertain how much of it is Shakspeare's and how much Fletcher's, but undoubtedly a good deal of it is indifferent drama and still more indifferent poetry. The Prologue—which, by the way, was spoken at His Majesty's by the impersonator of Wolsey's Jester—contains some lines which are not merely un-Shakspearean, but simply shocking ; and our own belief is that the

"Henry VIII"

author of it, whoever he was, ended it with the last line but two, and that when Shakspeare heard it for the first time he was so appalled at its bathos that he there and then added a couplet and let it finish jocularly, so that the speaker could clear off amid a titter. . Professor Dowden goes so far as to credit Fletcher with the best scene in the whole play and with Wolsey's really beautiful "Farewell! A long Farewell!" He also regards the scene in which the vision appears to Queen Katherine as "Fletcher in his highest style." This is all agreeably arguable as a literary question, and it is certainly interesting to search through the play for those passages in which the right Shakspearean fire does undoubtedly burn. There are plenty of them; but, as we have said, there is a good deal of dross mixed with the gold; and, on the whole, the latest version is probably as good as any that can be made compatible with so elaborate a spectacular display. Even in its abbreviated form the play lasted from seven o'clock on the First Night until nearly eleven.

Yet, if only some of the players—conspicuously the ^{old} Wolsey and the Queen Katherine—had not spoken so many of their lines with so devastating a deliberation, there would not have been a dull moment in all the four hours. Slow acting is as dull as a slow sermon and worse than slow cricket, and "impressiveness" gets its wrong effect when it nearly sends people to sleep.

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Apart from this defect, both impersonations had considerable merit. Sir Herbert showed none of that partiality for original and often rather finicking and trivial "business" which has marred more than one of his Shakspearean efforts. He still, however, addressed a great deal too much of his verse to the audience instead of to the character or characters he was supposed to be addressing; and this, of course, is not acting, but oratory. But he made a dignified figure of the great Lord Cardinal—rather a more scowling personage than we had expected, though there is warrant in history as well as in the play for that; and his panic-stricken whisper at the discovery of the tell-tale documents he had unwittingly let the King see was genuinely dramatic. Miss Vanbrugh's final denunciation of the Court was a highly effective piece of elocution; and if she also appeared too often to address herself to the auditors on the further side of the footlights rather than to those surrounding her—well, she can point to Harlow's famous picture of Mrs. Siddons in the part, in which the great actress is depicted as crying, "Lord Cardinal, to *you* I speak!" with her arm outstretched in the direction of the gentleman in red, but her eyes sternly fixed on the back of the dress circle of Drury Lane Theatre.

The popular honours at His Majesty's, so far as the acting was concerned, appeared to go to the very vivid performance of the part of the

"Henry VIII"

King by Mr. Arthur Bouchier, who not only looked the part but played it with great spirit. It is not a difficult part, and the late Mr. William Terriss acted it very well indeed. But it needs an actor with breadth of style, who can be at once manly, breezy, impetuous, blustering, and kingly. Perhaps the last of these adjectives is that which was least applicable to Mr. Bouchier's very jolly monarch ; but, in spite of that, we doubt if there is another actor on our stage just now who could render the character so satisfactorily. Mr. Henry Ainley secured three enthusiastic calls after Buckingham's "Farewell," but did not disturb memories of Mr. Forbes Robertson's beautiful and pathetic elocution at the Lyceum. He seemed restless ; and perhaps the torches, the semi-darkness, and the agitation of the stage-crowd detracted from the effect. Mr. Forbes Robertson, in his black velvet suit, stood at the back of the stage in a glow of sunlight, with the crowd listening to him in perfect quiet, so that every word he spoke made its music and its pathos fully felt. Of the rest of the characters in the long cast we need only say that they all seemed to be well played, but a word of special praise is due to the excellent elocution of Mr. Acton Bond, who, in the small part of Buckingham's traitorous surveyor, succeeded in making every word of his part perfectly audible throughout the theatre, despite the fact that he spoke most of it with his back to the

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audience. Miss Laura Cowie, as Anne Bullen, romped very prettily at the Cardinal's ball, but was a good deal too skittish for the text allotted her by the courtly poet. Shakspeare has drawn one Anne Bullen, modern historians have drawn another, and Miss Cowie attempted to blend them by speaking as the one and behaving as the other—a plan which cannot possibly work satisfactorily from any point of view. It is always best to play a Shakspearean character as it is written, both in the spirit and in the letter, and not to bother very much about what the historians may have said.

SIR HERBERT TREE'S SHYLOCK

*His Majesty's Theatre,
April 4th, 1908.*

THE character of the Jew stands forth in "The Merchant of Venice" more prominently than any other; and in reviving the comedy at His Majesty's Theatre, Sir Herbert Tree, not unnaturally, selected it for himself. The most interesting feature of his impersonation was the way in which he piled on the Jewish colour. He is reported to have copiously consulted Jewish authorities in connection with the revival; and we may therefore conclude that the remarkable manifestations of the old man's grief at the loss of his daughter and his ducats—the rending of the garments, the sudden physical collapse with the head bowed down to the earth, and the scattering of dust on the head—were touches of truth. Apart, however, from this striking and quite artistic feature, we did not find the new Shylock very impressive. The make-up, of course, was an interesting one, though we should have said there was no neces-

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sity for the father of the lively young Jessica to look seventy years of age. The costume was remarkably picturesque, and was worn with dignity. But the general performance was marked by over-emphasis. From the very beginning this was noticeable. When in the first scene with Bassanio the young gallant said, "Be assured you may" (take Antonio's bond), the retort, "I will be assured I may," was delivered in a shout, with outstretched arm and menacing look. After all, Shylock was only addressing Bassanio, not a crowded playhouse; and his mood at that moment should have been shown as reflective, quiet, the mood of a man who is rather pleased with the idea of doing a good morning's work. The shout was therefore excessive. Another and worse piece of over-emphasis came with the discovery of Jessica's flight. Everyone who saw Henry Irving in the part will recall his interpolation of the Jew's return after the supper with Bassanio, the old man's slow approach, lantern in hand, to the door of his house, and the tap at the door—on which the curtain fell. It was an inspired thing—the touch of an actor of genius. Sir Herbert Tree not only adopted it—which he was very well advised and perfectly justified in doing—but "bettered the instruction" with a vengeance, knocking at the door again and again, calling "Jessica!", entering the house (the street door is unlocked after all), rushing from room

Sir Herbert Tree's Shylock

to room (the audience could see him through lattice-work and open windows), still shrieking "Jessica!", and finally emerging in a very paroxysm, and collapsing at the sight of a distant gondola in which Lorenzo is abducting his pretty torch-bearer. No doubt there were those who enjoyed this scene and admired it. To us it seemed excessive. The actor filled out his part in the Trial scene with a quantity of "business" much of which was finely expressive, and his exit was dignified. Indeed, to alter the famous saying, nothing became him so well in his performance as the way in which he ended it. The final impression left on us, however, was that if Sir Herbert Tree's Shylock wins a place of any conspicuousness in theatrical history it will be by its display of racial characteristics.

With Miss Alexandra Carlisle's Portia we would deal gently. It was, we think, the inevitable consequence of entrusting the part to a young actress of much promise but scant experience and undeveloped personality. Just as Shylock is a world-figure of malignity and suffering, so is Portia one of joy, high spirits, and all that is rich and lovely in woman's temperament. Instead, however, of the poet's radiant, imperial creature, we had a comely young lady, who said witty things without making us laugh at them, and who, in the scene with Bassanio before he selects the casket, laid her hands upon his heart, and fondled him so openly that one was con-

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vinced that the "loving kiss" which followed the reading of the scroll was by no means the first the happy pair had exchanged. That is not Shakspeare's Portia. There were moments in the performance we liked—the restraint, for instance, with which she watched the Princes of Morocco and Arragon making their choice, and the cool air of badinage with which she demanded Bassanio's ring after the trial; but as a whole the character did not live, and the poetry and glow of it were lacking.

The Nerissa of Miss Dorothy Minto was almost amusingly modern and very unamusingly indistinct. The Jessica of Miss Auriol Lee, on the other hand, was a figure of memorable beauty. We cannot recall ever having seen the part more sincerely or poetically played. Mr. Basil Gill's Bassanio was agreeable to the eye, but not distinguished in any other way; and the Launcelot Gobbo of Mr. Norman Page was clever, neat, audible, and everything it should have been, except funny. Mr. Alfred Brydone looked and spoke the part of the Prince of Morocco with great dignity; and good performances also came from Mr. William Haviland in the part of Antonio, and Mr. Charles Quartermaine as Gratiano.

MR. LEWIS WALLER IN "HENRY V"

The Lyric Theatre,
November 25th, 1908.

MR. LEWIS WALLER reopened the Lyric Theatre last night with a revival of "King Henry V," in which he played the title-part as well as he has ever done—and no English actor within living memory has played it better. His bearing and aspect were kingly in the most decorative sense of the term; and he delivered the wonderful speeches with which his part is studded not only with splendid energy, but with a better management of the breathing than we have noticed sometimes of late in his rendering of bravura passages. He was enormously and deservedly popular throughout the evening; and it is certainly not extravagant to say that the impersonation takes high rank among the Shakspearean performances of the day. The great figure of the King so dominates the play that all the others run risk of soon becoming "out of sight out of mind." Mr. Louis Calvert, however, enabled Pistol to stand forth pro-

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minently, swaggering and swelling with "buxom valour" in a most engaging fashion.

The Bardolph of Mr. Robert Bolder was a good deal less lifelike; and we were astonished to hear the actor punctuating the Hostess's description of the death of Falstaff with loud groans that brought foolish laughter from the pit and gallery. Shakspeare suggests no interruption of the speech, and Bardolph was too fond of his old master to make comic sounds at such a moment. When it is added that, as everyone knows, the passage is one of the most poignant in all Shakspeare, last night's mistake seems the more regrettable; and it is to be hoped that the actor will reconsider it. To hear the audience laughing after such a line as the Hostess's "'How now, Sir John' quoth I. 'What, man! be of good cheer.' So a' cried out—'God, God, God!' three or four times"—is to feel a positive hurt. Mr. J. Halliwell Hobbes impersonated the Archbishop of Canterbury in the first act and the French Herald, Montjoy, in the later scenes very well; and Mr. Owen Roughwood made a manly and handsome Dauphin. We are not so sure about Mr. Hubert Druce's King of France. At the time of Agincourt Charles VI was only forty-seven years of age. The actor made him look at least sixty. He also portrayed his Majesty as a violent imbecile, and no doubt thought himself justified in so doing by the fact that according to

Mr. Lewis Waller in "Henry V"

historians the wits of *le Bien-Aimé* were not particularly sharp. Shakspeare, however, indicates nothing of the kind, and the inartistic result of the actor's demeanour was that it clashed badly with the sentences he had to utter.

Miss Madge Titheradge made a dainty Katherine, and Miss Fay Davis delivered those noble lyrics, the speeches of Chorus, with intelligence and dignity, but had to contend against the senseless and distracting interruption of occasional "accompaniments" by the orchestra! Surely Mr. Waller cannot think that such speeches, delivered by a well-graced actress, need "incidental music" to help them along. The play was handsomely mounted, and scene after scene was gay with colour and charged with life. With the part of the King so gallantly impersonated, the whole thing became a sort of superb trumpet-call. After thrilling Englishmen for more than three centuries, it still quickens the imagination and fires the heart.

MISS GENEVIEVE WARD AS LADY MACBETH

His Majesty's,
November 30th, 1908.

ONE unforgettable memory abides with us from the remarkable entertainment at His Majesty's Theatre in aid of the fund for providing a memorial in Italy to Adelaide Ristori—the appearance of Miss Genevieve Ward in the sleep-walking scene of “Macbeth.” Miss Ward was a pupil, a friend, and a sister-artist of Ristori; the garments she was wearing had been those worn by the great Italian actress and afterwards given to the English artist; and the occasion was one eminently calculated to place a severe strain upon her. One result of it all was so great a weakness of the voice that over a large part of the auditorium scarcely a word she said can have been heard. Yet the huge audience sat in perfect stillness, and showed by their prolonged applause at the finish that their attention had been something more than a mark of respect to the last of our classic tragic actresses. Miss Ward was, indeed, suffering from great weakness.

Genevieve Ward as Lady Macbeth

From our place in the dress circle we saw her through the parted curtains nearly fall to the stage after her appearance in response to the applause. In spite of all, however, she gave a performance which no one present is likely to forget, a most perfect, beautiful, and profoundly impressive piece of *acting*. The slow walk, the eyes staring into nothingness, the groping of the hands, the wonderful wringing of them in the horror of the blood from which no water would clean them, and the very whispering, inaudible as it was, of the broken sentences which every school-boy knows—all these made up a performance such as is seldom seen on our stage. We who saw Ristori in this scene seemed to see her again. The vast majority of the audience, however, can have had no such memory; and their silence and strained attention was one of the finest things we have ever seen in a London theatre, and a magnificent answer to those who tell us from time to time that Londoners do not want great drama or great acting. Miss Ward may well have been proud of it, and of the cheers with which she was received when the scene was finished: and every lover of our stage who witnessed it may be proud of it too.

The programme included Mr. Forbes Robertson in the play-scene of "Hamlet," acting as beautifully as ever; Miss Lily Brayton in a scene of "The Taming of the Shrew," filling the stage with her spirited outbursts; Sir

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Herbert Tree in a scene from "The Merchant of Venice"; Sir George Alexander and Miss Irene Vanbrugh in the second act of "The Thief," the splendid singing of several songs by the veteran, Sir Charles Santley, and a host of other attractive people in attractive things. But above and beyond all remains the memory of that whispering, tragic figure, and the wonderful acting of Miss Ward in a scene that lasted only a few minutes and the recollections of which will last a lifetime.

MR. LOUIS CALVERT AS FALSTAFF

*The Lyric Theatre,
May 11th, 1909.*

HISTORY tells us that when James Quin played the part of Falstaff for the first time at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, in the year 1720, "the just applause he met with is incredible, continued clappings and peals of laughter in some measure interrupting the representation; though it was impossible that any irregularity whatever could have increased the mirth or excited the approbation of the audience." Very much the same happened at the Lyric Theatre when Mr. Louis Calvert essayed the part at the first of a series of matinées, and presented us with the Fat Knight indeed. For once in a way an impersonation of this mighty creation proved to be as big in drollery as in bulk. Nothing was overdone. The voice was that of a swiller, but not extravagantly so; the body was big, but not beyond all possibility; the dialogue was spoken without the misguided energy which suggests that Shakspeare's wit wants a good deal

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of emphasis on the part of the actor if it is to be discovered by the spectator in the stalls or gallery. We have never heard the soliloquy on Honour so perfectly spoken; and again and again familiar sentences received, not a new significance (for no actor can give that to utterances so unmistakable and so well known), but a just significance—which very few actors seem able or willing to give them.

The fine and fiery Hotspur of Mr. Lewis Waller, which has been seen in London before, was seen again with real pleasure; and we had an interesting, youthful, and manly Prince Hal from Mr. Robert Loraine, who seemed to suggest that the young Prince's association with Falstaff and Co. was at least as much a matter of intellectual curiosity as of any particular partiality towards riot and dishonour.

“THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL”

*His Majesty's,
April 7th, 1909.*

SIR HERBERT TREE attributes the abiding sway of “The School for Scandal” to the “heart interest” with which it is informed; and probably he is right. All Art that lives at all lives in the Heart; and there is an abundance of appeal to the emotions in this wonderful comedy, which caused such a prodigious rapping of canes on the floor of Drury Lane Theatre on the evening of May 8th, a hundred and thirty-two years ago. Sir Peter, for instance, is stupid but with a kindly stupidity that renders him lovable; Lady Teazle—one of the few classic figures of Romance whose Christian name no one has ever heard—is adorable in all her moods; and who can resist the generous spendthrift, Charles; the genial, large, old-crusted, English humanity of Sir Oliver (a figure that might have stepped straight out of the pages of Goldsmith); or the dainty fortitude of Maria? And yet, even while the appeal of these famous creations

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is admitted, there are other things in the comedy which have, at any rate, helped to keep them alive ; and above all, the diamond-like sparkle of its long stretches of witty dialogue. Cannot one read over and over again, for instance, that opening scene between Lady Sneerwell and Snake, with the rascal's compliments to her ladyship's "delicacy of tint and mellowness of sneer" as a spreader of scandal ? And those wonderful scenes in which the whole crew of slanderers take part, with Backbite's description of his book of projected elegies, and Crabtree's account of how Miss Letitia Piper lost her character, and Lady Sneerwell's allusion to the widow Ochre's wrinkles ? Familiar as they have become, are they not still a joy ? And that delicious little outburst of Lady Teazle : "For my part, I'm sure I wish it was Spring all the year round, and that roses grew under our feet" ? It makes one happy merely to read it, just as the opening of that second chapter of the fourth book of "Tom Jones," ushering in the lovely Sophia, makes one happy at the music and rapture of it. And we really must say here in parenthesis, that it was positively cruel of Miss Marie Löhr, at His Majesty's Theatre, to spoil it by letting it seemingly be inspired, not by her own sprightliness, but by the roses decorating her skirt ! How *can* an actress rob her part of imagination in this way ? However, such are the qualities which have helped to make "The

“ *The School for Scandal* ”

School for Scandal” an immortal. Construction, on the other hand, is not one of them. It is very much a play of water-tight compartments. The picture auction is one ; the screen scene is another ; the quarrels of Sir Peter and his wife are two more ; and they are all masterpieces, but indifferently strung together. Lady Sneerwell’s passion for Charles is suggested, dropped, picked up again, and never made to live ; and Charles’s love of Maria is another of the shadowiest of love interests. Through it all, however, flashes the author’s wit ; his exquisite literary sense never flags ; and as Sir Herbert Tree says, there is the “ heart interest.” Yes, it is no matter for wonder that the play London hailed so enthusiastically in 1777 should still be one of our delights in 1909.

The revival at His Majesty’s Theatre, was, in one respect at any rate, the finest witnessed in London since the Bancrofts’ at the old Prince of Wales’s. As a picture of late eighteenth-century life in England it was one long delight. Fashions, manners, house-decoration, street-life, drawing-room dancing, the music of the day—all these, and many other things, were presented with the greatest care. We saw Lady Teazle sally forth to go calling, accompanied by her black boy carrying her parasol ; we saw Mrs. Candour step from her chair before Sir Peter’s hall-door ; and we saw a Sir Benjamin Backbite, who may have been Georgian, or may only have lived in

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some Aubrey Beardsley drawing, but who certainly was at least a hundred years away from anything known in the real life of to-day. It was all very curious, and picturesque, and we think Sheridan would have liked it and felt flattered could he but have seen it. On the spectacular side the revival certainly calls for nothing but the warmest congratulations.

And—a far more important thing—there was also some fine acting to be seen. Let us mention at once the remarkably effective rendering of the opening scene by Mr. James Hearne (Snake) and Miss Ellis Jeffreys (Lady Sneerwell). We have never known it nearly so well acted before. It was, in fact, perfectly delightful to see how both the actor and actress gave the fullest significance to everything they had to say or do. Mr. Edward Terry (warmly welcomed back to the stage—indeed, it was an evening of welcomes) was the best Crabtree of our time. His face seemed gnarled with a wicked, pugnacious look; but his voice had all the old, droll inflections, and his telling of the Letitia Piper anecdote in the first act, and of the story of the “duel” in the last were the comic *tours de force* of the evening. Mr. Esmond’s Backbite was clever and incisive, but surely a little too extravagant, too effeminate, too profuse of eccentric gesture. The Backbite of the play is a foolish young man; Mr. Esmond seemed to conceive him as something rather complex in a disagreeable way. He

"The School for Scandal"

is entitled to his view, and he worked it out with his usual skill ; but we found it forced. Neither did Mr. Basil Gill satisfy us in the part of Joseph. Of course, he looked very handsome, and spoke with fine elocution, but we missed the malignity of the man ; and the insincerity of his "sentiments" was made so manifest by gesture and facial expression that even so poor a judge of men as Sir Peter Teazle would never have been taken in by them. An admirable Rowley from Mr. Hermann Vezin, a rich, manly Sir Oliver from Mr. Henry Neville, and a most amusing Moses from Mr. Lionel Brough showed the younger members of the audience how fine must have been the Stage of thirty years ago, of which these three actors are veteran survivors who can still do work so distinguished.*

Sir Herbert Tree presented Sir Peter as a well-set-up, resonant gentleman, evidently with plenty of life in him. A little more briskness and a little less gloom would have been welcome ; but one point made was very impressive—the sudden ageing of the face after the fall of the screen. Miss Löhr was as charming and clever as ever, and got through the part of Lady Teazle with remarkable address. The part, however, really requires that rare combination, a great comedienne with tragic power ; and not even Miss Löhr's girlish charm could reconcile us to

* Since the writing of this article, Death has removed these three fine players.

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a delivery of the scathing speech to Joseph after the fall of the screen so mild and gentle as that which she gave us. The sentence which begins, "As for that smooth-tongued hypocrite" should surely seem to strike him in the face with a whip of steel. Miss Löhr failed to convey any such idea; and her exit, broken and bent, was not the exit of Lady Teazle. Happily, there remained a first-rate Charles in Mr. Robert Loraine, a high-spirited young gallant, too full of fun to see the tragedy in the dénouement of the screen-scene, but also too chivalrous to be scarcely able to speak for laughter at Sir Peter's discomfiture, an attitude which a good many Charleses we have seen have taken. Mr. Loraine always seemed natural and spontaneous; and his gaiety affected the audience and helped to win an ovation for him after the second and third acts. The part of Maria was, unfortunately, little more than a nullity in the hands of Miss Dagmar Wiehe; but Miss Suzanne Sheldon was an amusing Mrs. Candour, and Mr. Godfrey Tearle played the part of Trip to just the right air.

"THE IMAGE"

By Lady Gregory

*The Court Theatre,
May 1st, 1910.*

LADY GREGORY'S new play in three acts, "The Image," is so original and humorous in its story, so droll, and occasionally so tender, in the telling, as to be worthy of comparison with the best of the works the Irish National Theatre Society has presented to us.

A couple of whales have been washed ashore in a storm by night on the Munster coast, and the people of a little seaport town are anxious to do something "practical" with the profits they are going to make out of the sale of the oil. The priest and the local authorities ask for a suggestion from the three wisest and oldest men, and, after a great deal of squabble and argument, it is decided that the most practical use of the money would be to spend it in the erection of a statue. Then comes the question, to whom shall the monument be erected? Some are for Parnell, others for O'Connell. The storm, however, has washed up not only the two

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dead whales, but also a bit of board, on which are painted the words, "Hugh O'Lara," and this has fallen into the hands of an ancient visionary of the village, who has only lately escaped from the workhouse, one Malachi Naughton, who, regarding the two words as a divine communication, demands that the statue shall be erected in Hugh's honour. It is true that nobody knows aught of any Hugh O'Lara, but what of that? The elderly idiot and an old widow woman of the port have vague recollections that once upon a time someone of that name ran away from home and fought against the English; so in the end the idea is adopted. Designs are obtained from Dublin for the statue; a grand local demonstration, with band and banners, is organised; and it is decided "next week, with the help of God, to start collecting the oil." And just as everything is settled, it is discovered that one of the dead whales has been despoiled of its oil by the boys of another town, and that the other has been washed back to sea by the tide. So, after all, there will be no oil and no profits, and, therefore, no statue; and the only consolation left for the people is that they have had "a grand talk," the memory of which will provide further discourse for years to come!

It is impossible without quotation to give any idea of the wealth of wit, eloquence, and imagination with which Lady Gregory has decorated this delicious satire at the expense

“ The Image ”

of the taste for vain chatter and irrelevant enthusiasm in some of her humbler countrymen. Nor, sitting in a darkened theatre, was the taking of notes very practicable. One phrase, however, has stuck in our memory—that in which the ancient visionary, describing his early morning flight from the workhouse, said: “I slipped out in the half-dark, at the battling of the day and night.” The dialogue is full of poetical touches of that kind. And there is a beautifully written scene in the second act, in which the old widow woman, having been told by a neighbour that she may not meet her long-dead husband in heaven, and that if she did, he would not recognise, in the bundle of skin and bone and rags she has become, his once blooming comrade, replies with a trembling outburst of faith which goes straight to the heart of the audience. It is, however, the wit of the thing, and its felicity of invention, that constitute its chief charm.

The acting was perfect. The characters literally “lived” in their quaintness of aspect and richness and queerness of talk. Mr. Arthur Sinclair was at his drollest as the local stone-cutter, who was very ready to make a statue, but preferred that the subject should not be a man who had lived “in our own time” as he might have left relatives or neighbours who would discover the effigy to be a bad likeness; and Miss Sara Allgood was not less delightful as his

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busy, sensible wife. Miss Maire O'Neill, as the old widow, disguised her pretty face and musical voice out of all recognition; and Mr. Fred O'Donovan gave a vivid study of the various imbecile transcendentalisms of Malachi Naughton. Mr. Sydney Morgan, Mr. J. M. Kerrigan, and Mr. J. A. O'Rourke impersonated the other parts with equally graphic and humorous effect; while the very simple scene served as an effective background for the author's droll and pathetic delineations.

"THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD"

By the late John M. Synge

*The Court Theatre,
June 7th, 1909.*

A HEARING of the late Mr. J. M. Synge's remarkable comedy, "The Playboy of the Western World," has left us still in doubt as to the real purpose the author can have had in writing it. One who knew him well has told us that at the bottom of it was an irresponsible and irrepressible desire to provoke laughter at any cost, together with a tragic belief that such men and women as the characters in the play are all that have been left to Ireland after years of misgovernment and emigration. It is hard to understand the play in the light of either explanation. It is really difficult, either in the theatre or the study, to laugh very enjoyably over the brutishness and cowardice of the men, and the coarseness of the women, here set forward as County Mayo types. If, however, it be the fact that emigration has really only

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left such human scum behind in the Island of Saints, then not only is Ireland in a bad way indeed, but it is as well that those of her leaders who flatter her should be confronted with this ghastly exposure of the sort of men and women for whom they are demanding nationhood and self-government.

Apart from its "purpose," however, the comedy remains a masterpiece of picturesque writing, of the art of cleverly telling a grim story, and of a cynically subtle characterisation. The character of the Playboy, the lout who has been "made a mighty man of by the power of a lie," is wonderfully composed. A piece of moral flotsam who can yet make love with the charm and assurance this young ruffian displays, is truly "a creation" so far as the modern theatre is concerned. . . . "I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God, is all ages sitting lonesome in His golden chair" . . . or . . . "Gaming in a gap of sunshine, with yourself stretched back unto your necklace, in the flowers of the earth" . . . or, again, "Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness, spearing salmons in the Owen or the Carrowmore." To hear a loutish blackguard suddenly inspired, in the exquisitely written love-scene of the third act, to talk in this fashion is a new experience. And the girl's

"Playboy of the Western World"

share in the antiphon is just as delicious. . . . "And I not knowing at all there was the like of you drawing near, like the stars of God." The whole play is sprinkled with this imaginative talk; and one sits and listens to it in sheer hedonism as it falls on the ear in the musical voices of the Abbey Theatre company. So delightful a self-indulgence is not often to be enjoyed in a theatre; and we can pardon all the cynicism, or incoherently expressed patriotism, or whatever may be the inwardness of the play, for the sake of the music of it.

Miss Maire O'Neill, as Pegeen, gave an enchanting impersonation; and Mr. Fred O'Donovan lent subtle expression to every phase of the complex character of the Playboy. Except for the fact that now and then she spoke a little too rapidly, Miss Sara Allgood gave a delightful study in the part of the Widow Quin; and the other characters were all acted with the simple sincerity and finished art which have made the Abbey company famous. And it is pleasant to be able to add that the performance was received with great enthusiasm last night, and that at the finish of the third act the curtain had to be raised three or four times in response to cheering which seemed to be coming from all parts of the house.

Mr. Synge's play was preceded by Lady Gregory's little one-act tragedy of the twelfth century, "Dervorgilla," setting forth the story

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of the remorse and death of the Queen who believed herself to have been responsible, in the years gone by, for the arrival of the English in Ireland. Here again Miss Allgood as the stricken Queen, Mr. Fred O'Donovan as a wandering song-maker, and Miss Maire O'Neill and Mr. Arthur Sinclair in minor parts, gave performances rich in imagination and sincerity.

“HARVEST”

By Mr. Lennox Robinson

*The Court Theatre,
June 7th, 1910.*

ONE fact concerning Mr. Lennox Robinson's play, "Harvest," which stands forth with some clearness, is that the author has written it with a purpose; and, if we may judge from its rather violent concluding scene, that purpose is the demonstration of the sinister effects of education upon the Irish peasantry. We shall admit, hereafter, that to take this view may be to misunderstand it; but, in the scene to which we refer, the author does in a very unmistakable way present us with the spectacle of a farmer's family claiming, through the lips of its least "respectable" member, to have been ruined morally by the village schoolmaster. One son, over in England, has "forsaken his religion," and grown ashamed of his country and his people. Another, in Dublin, has married a young gentlewoman, only to sponge upon her, and, in a fit of temper, to insult and assault her. And a daughter has become a harlot in London. The scene,

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indeed, in which all this is flung at the audience is almost intolerable in its brutality ; and that fact sets one reflecting that perhaps, after all, the dramatist's object was not an exposure of the effects of education so much as a picture of the general rottenness and viciousness of his humbler countrymen. For it is also shown that the very schoolmaster who is said to have done all the mischief is an old man, whose system was, therefore, doubtless absurdly old-fashioned and unscientific ; that the old farmer, the beloved father of the three " young hopefuls," and for whom no claim of having been " educated " is made, sets fire to his own farm-buildings in a time of financial stress, so that he may claim the money for which they are insured ; and that his eldest son, who has stayed at home and looked after the farm and apparently never got beyond the elementary stages of " the three R's," is an enthusiastic accessory to his father's fraud, a self-confessed incompetent even as a farmer, and about the most foul-mouthed individual we have so far had the pleasure of meeting in a theatre.

Whatever, therefore, may have been Mr. Robinson's hortatory purpose in writing " Harvest," he can, at all events, be unanimously admitted to have painted quite as sordid a picture of his rural countrymen as Mr. Synge did in " The Playboy of the Western World," unrelieved, however, by the verbal magic of that remarkable

"Harvest"

work. That such plays are very painful to the thoughtful observer goes without saying. It is also probable, however, that they serve a useful purpose, if only by setting the spectator reflecting upon what the dramatist apparently wishes him to believe to be the condition of the Irish peasantry, notwithstanding the spiritual and political influences to which they have been clinging for generations with so pathetic a loyalty. The acting, as usual, was, for the most part, exceedingly natural. Mr. Arthur Sinclair was, perhaps, a little artificial in the part of the schoolmaster; but Miss O'Neill as the "tempestuous petticoat" of the family, who rejoices in the discovery that the father, to whose rectitude her last rag of faith has been pinned, is a swindler, as it frees her from her last compunction in returning to "the dreadful splendid life" in London; Mr. J. A. O'Rourke as the old farmer himself; Mr. J. M. Kerrigan as the illiterate and cursing elder son; and Miss Sara Allgood as the other son's unfortunate wife, all gave that impression of sincerity and absorption in their work which helps to place the performances of the Abbey Theatre company among the greatest theatrical pleasures of the day.

"THE SALOON"

By Mr. Henry James

*The Little Theatre,
January 17th, 1911.*

WHAT a thing of power the one-act play can become in the hands of a master was shown when Mr. Henry James's "The Saloon" was given for the first time at the Little Theatre. That Mr. James can set the nerves even of his readers tingling with something very like terror, everyone who has read "The Turn of the Screw," "The Beast in the Jungle," and many of his other stories knows sufficiently well. In "The Saloon" he attains a similar effect on an audience in a theatre. The little play begins quite cheerfully with a number of people in the drawing-room—the saloon—of General Sir Philip Wingrave, K.C.B., a grizzled and stern old warrior and descendant of warriors, whose grandson, Owen, has thought out the morality of military service for himself, and found it wasteful and entirely abominable. His cousin Kate, to whom he is engaged, reviles him for his cowardice, and glories in the memory of another General



"Camera Portrait" by Hoppé

MR. HENRY JAMES

“ *The Saloon* ”

Wingrave, two generations back, who had beaten a son of his own to death for a similar display of conscientious scruples. The murder had been committed in that very room, and the spirit of that grim Wingrave still, she says, walks the house once a year at midnight. His friend, Dr. Coyle, goes downstairs to try and reconcile the General to the lad, but returns with the tidings that the old man has disinherited him. And when the youth is left alone in the room at midnight, and the lamp begins to burn low, Kate creeps back to him to make a last appeal to him to be worthy of his family. His reply is a violent outburst against the “brute” of two generations back, and all the other uniformed murderers in his line. A terrified appeal from the girl follows for him to be silent ; then comes a darkness, the entry of a pale, dimly seen figure, a man’s yell of pain, a girl’s shriek. When the room lightens again, Owen Wingrave lies stretched on the floor, dead.

Such is the story, easily enough outlined here, but set forth by the dramatist with an art so perfect, and with touches so delicate and so sure, that it is impossible to do anything like justice to them in what can necessarily be only the swift and brief recording of a most manifold impression. Again and again in the opening scenes of the play there fell upon the ear those soft rhythms of prose, those delicate economies of expression which every lover of Mr. Henry

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James's work knows so well; and when the tragedy suddenly deepened, it came in stroke upon stroke of merciless power, till the spectators fairly shivered. And all in spite of the fact that, when the crisis arrived, the acting became merely melodramatic, a crude contest between a man yelling and a woman screaming, a sheer noise that afflicted the ear but had little to do with the soul of the hearer. If Miss Dora Barton and Mr. E. Vanderlip had played their great scene with a little more quiet intensity and a little less uproar, they would have got a good deal nearer to the emotional centre of the audience. Indeed, except for Mr. Halliwell Hobbes, who played the part of Coyle perfectly, the success achieved was emphatically that of the author. That it was a remarkable success attests the power of his work. "The Saloon" is, beyond doubt, one of the most thrilling one-act plays produced in London of late years.

"PAID IN FULL"

*The Aldwych Theatre,
September 8th, 1908.*

THE fame of Mr. Eugene Walter's play, "Paid in Full," presented for the first time in London at the Aldwych Theatre, had preceded it from New York, and those of us who take an interest in the American stage anticipated the piece with keen interest. We knew that it had drawn crowds for months at the Astor Theatre; that it was the work of a new author; and that it ended artistically with everything left unfinished—as so many "climaxes" in real life do. In a recent issue of the "Munsey Magazine" a writer called it a play that had proved itself epoch-making. And, as it unfolded itself at the Aldwych Theatre, we could see that, acted with the sincerity its grave problem demands, its success would follow as naturally as night the day. To begin with, there is a deal of very interesting character in it. The young husband, with no moral backbone, who robs his employer, and, on his robbery being discovered, sends his wife to him by night, with *carte blanche* to arrange matters so that he does not get sent to gaol,

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is a repellent type, but the dramatist has drawn him strongly and consistently. The employer, a sensualist and a hard man, who has made money sometimes by cruel means, is another solidly built-up figure; and the scene in which he discovers that the beautiful wife who has come to his bachelor rooms at the dead of night is a good woman, and thereupon pockets his sensuality, gives her the written release she desires for her husband, and sends her home, is obviously capable of exercising a great dramatic effect. And the last scene of all, in which the wife, having saved her husband from public ignominy, turns and rends him, declares that her love for him is dead, denounces him as a liar and a shuffler, and leaves him for ever, is one which, acted with dignity and passion, should bring the play to a brilliant conclusion. In New York this scene must have been so acted; for a previously unknown actress, Miss Lilian Albertson, made a sudden and great reputation in the part, and this scene is its principal opportunity. Yet the London audience was never thrilled, and there was none of that general cheering at the end of the evening which proclaims that a play has "got home."

The explanation of the comparative mildness of the effect created here lay in the acting, and particularly in that of the part of the wife. Miss Hilda Antony is a young actress with a tall and graceful figure and a charming face. Last

"Paid In Full"

November she played the title-part in "The Education of Elizabeth" very nicely at the Haymarket; and since then she has appeared in one or two other parts, in which her personal beauty and musical voice have won due admiration. Judging, however, from her work in "Paid in Full," she has either not had sufficient experience to be able to rise to an exacting dramatic situation, or she has come to the conclusion that calm and quiet acting is the best, and that to let oneself go, as the phrase stands, is not a thing to be desired. Whichever may be the explanation, her performance was curiously ineffective. There is a good deal to be said for the "calm and quiet" style, and some living actresses—Duse, for example, and Mrs. Kendal—have often moved an audience to its centre with scarcely a rising of the voice. But in these cases the calm has only been outward, and there has been a vivid suggestion of immense force under restraint. Miss Antony failed to give that impression. All we saw was a charming young lady, with an appealing smile, saying sad things very slowly, and nice things very sweetly, but generally not passing much beyond the rôle of a graceful reciter. That last speech to the husband should surely strike him as with whips of steel. A woman who has loved has come to despise. A wife who has borne with impatiences and unkindnesses innumerable has finally been submitted to the most hideous of all humiliations. The

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man who cowers, or should cower, before her has proved himself the lowest of the low, a lazy, egotistical windbag at the best, and at the worst a thing of vileness unspeakable. Such is the impeachment with which she leaves him; and Miss Antony spoke it in perfectly measured tones, with a ladylike sadness, and so melted away! If she could have trusted herself to speak as an outraged woman would speak under such provocation, with tones and glances of fury and contempt, the curtain would have fallen amid a scene that would have more than rewarded her for the acting.

Mr. Louis Calvert played with his customary authority in the part of the employer, and the only fault that could be found with his performance was that here, too, the pace was sometimes unnecessarily slow. Even some of the best of our actors are far more in love with the pause than the interests of realism demand. Mr. Robert Loraine played admirably as the husband. It is a most difficult as well as a most unsympathetic part, but the actor threw his whole nervous force into it unreservedly, and made a vital thing of it.

In the part of a kindly friend of the husband and wife, Mr. Paul Arthur (warmly welcomed back to London) gave a charming performance, tender, manly, humorous, and irradiating with a genial and strong humanity every scene in which he took part. Adequately acted, there

“ *Paid In Full* ”

is no reason why “ Paid in Full ” should not be as great a success in London as it has proved at the Astor Theatre in New York. In many respects it is the most interesting native dramatic work America has sent us of late years.

MISS ROSE STAHL IN "THE CHORUS LADY"

The Vaudeville,
April 19th, 1909.

IT is always a pleasure to us to see American acting ; it is so sincere, so unselfish, so absorbed in the part and the play, so perfectly oblivious of the audience. And at the Vaudeville Theatre in "The Chorus Lady" it gave us real delight, in spite of the fact that it was being offered in a very middling play indeed. Indeed, as a drama "The Chorus Lady" is nothing. It just tells a sentimental story of how an elder sister saved a younger one from possible dishonour at the quite unnecessary expense of her own good name, her own lover's feelings, and her mother's pride. She found the girl in a villain's rooms, and, when she was discovered there, she pretended that it was she herself who had come there for "no good." There was no real need to make any such pretence. The girl was but a child ; and all that the elder sister had to do with her was to take her away, and, if necessary, tell the whole story. And it is merely to give the leading

Rose Stahl in "The Chorus Lady"

actress a chance of showing tragic power that the plot is developed in this hopelessly artificial way. Of course, everything is put right in the last act; and, with the falling of the curtain, the heroine vanishes amid a blaze of universal reverence. Fortunately, or unfortunately, however, English audiences have got out of the way of believing in these stage sacrifices, and to that extent "*The Chorus Lady*" may be in some danger; but they have not got out of the way of admiring and enjoying finished acting, and for that reason we hope with some confidence that it will be a great success.

The leading character, the elder sister, Patricia O'Brien, is the daughter of a country racehorse trainer, who has gone on the New York musical comedy stage; and it is played by Miss Rose Stahl with a humour that carried all before it in the first and second acts, and a pathetic sincerity that lent a different but not less artistic distinction to the third and fourth. Miss Stahl has a most expressive face, a pair of clear grey eyes that can flash fires of fun or anger with equal effect, and a voice that can in a moment silence a laughing audience and fill it with a sort of fearful wonder as to what may happen next. She has the indefinable things called magnetism and temperament. She conquered with her first entry—showing the coming-home of the woman tired for the moment of the glitter of the footlights, happy to see her "marm" and father again,

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and in bliss at the thought of meeting the man she loves. There had been no one to meet her at the station, and she is disposed to be a little angry, a little mortified. "I used to think I was the big screech in this family!" she cries, in one of the American outbursts which are another joy of "The Chorus Lady." And at the end of the act her discovery that a young "swell" who has gone into partnership in the training-stables was philandering with her younger sister, Nora, her silent mental summing-up of the situation, and her announcement that she would take the girl back with her to the Stage, all formed a piece of most accomplished acting. Some of that which followed was perhaps showier, but it was not better. Indeed, it could not have been better; but it was as good. The enthusiasm with which Miss Stahl was greeted at the end of the evening—and which culminated in her having to make a speech of thanks—was no more than a just tribute to the display of a very genuine gift.

Nor was it only Miss Stahl who upheld the credit of the American stage in this artificial play. Patricia's father and mother were beautifully impersonated by Mr. Giles Shine and Miss Alice Leigh. The old people "lived" before us, a couple of homely figures composed with countless life-like touches of humour and truth. And the Nora—how quaintly pretty and prettily quaint was Miss Eva Dennison in the part, how

Rose Stahl in "The Chorus Lady"

tellingly she spoke and looked, and how easily we seemed able to read the *mind* of the girl! It was a most interesting performance. Then there was Patricia's lover, Dan Mallory, impersonated by Mr. Wilfred Lucas with an art so absolutely sincere that it would be hard to praise it too highly. Here again the manly, devoted young fellow lived before us so vividly that it did not seem acting at all. There was no posing, no self-consciousness, not a thought of the audience; it simply seemed the real thing. Who that loves acting can withhold his respect from artists so honest and so genuine? The part of the vicious Dick Crawford was as well played by Mr. Francis Byrne; and in a most amusing second act, its scene the chorus room at the "Longacre Theatre," with the girls dressing for their performances, there were half a dozen little character sketches so droll that the temptation to laugh was irresistible again and again, though sometimes the realism of it all held it in check, and sometimes the mere prettiness of the performers kept one interested in a different way.

We have referred to the Americanisms with which the dialogue is sprinkled. One of the drollest came from Patricia in the second act, when, in reply to someone who said that dancing must be hard work, she retorted: "It's the smiling that's hard! It's no cinch to have to stand on one toe while your other points a quarter

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to six, and to keep a face like a cat's that's just eaten the canary!" At another time she described a theatrical failure as "the manager catching chilblains in the box office," and a couple of very bad comedians as "two morgues," and alluded to one of her brainless admirers as a person with "nothing on his mind but his hair." These things do not look very droll in print, but they came with irresistible comicality from the living actress with that quaint American accent—a medium quite as good as a Scotsman's drawl for emphasising the pawkiness of a speech. And so, with American fun, and, above all, with the sincerity of American acting, the audience at the Vaudeville Theatre had a notable evening, with a welcome sense of freshness about it—a sense of something unusual, curious, friendly, and fascinating.

"THE BRASS BOTTLE"

*The Vaudeville,
September 16th, 1909.*

THE author of "Vice Versa" has once more put the laughter-loving world under a heavy obligation. There has not been much laughter in the plays so far presented this season; but the audience at the Vaudeville for the first performance of "The Brass Bottle" had more than enough. The piece is, in fact, the drollest and most audacious farce that has been seen in London for a long time, and its success was complete.

Once again Mr. Anstey has called the supernatural to his aid. In "Vice Versa" it was the garuda stone that did the mischief. In "The Brass Bottle" it is a Djinn, who for three thousand years has been sealed up in a jar which Horace Ventimore, a young and not very flourishing architect, buys for a sovereign at a sale. On being released, he expresses his gratitude by seeking to grant his benefactor's every wish—generally with results the very opposite to those desired. For instance, Ventimore's rooms are somewhat humble; the Djinn, with a wave of his hand,

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converts them into a sort of replica of the Sala de los Abencerrajes in the Alhambra. Horace has invited his fiancée, Sylvia, and her father and mother, Professor and Mrs. Futvoye, to dinner ; the Djinn provides a sumptuous meal on the richest Arab lines of the year 1000 B.C., served at a low table by black attendants—"niggers swarming about the kitchen like beetles !" complains the landlady—and the company seated on cushions on the floor. This is followed by the apparition of a dozen dancing maidens, one of whom concludes her performance by clasping Horace round the knees and calling him her "protector" and "the light of her eyes." The results of the whole entertainment are a burst of indignation on the part of the Professor at the young man's extravagance and dissipation, followed by stomachic pains at having had to drink wine that has been kept for years in a goatskin ; a great deal of jealous anger on the part of Sylvia ; and the sinister satisfaction of one Spencer Pringle, who is not only Horace's professional rival, but also his rival in love.

The Djinn further provides his benefactor with a rich client, Mr. Samuel Wackerbath, who requires a £100,000 house built on a pleasant hillside in Surrey. He also builds the house in a single night, and makes it, as the infuriated client puts it, "a blend of the Brighton Pavilion and the Kew palm house," with no drainage system. And when Mr. Wackerbath meets the Djinn,

“ The Brass Bottle ”

now in European costume, in Horace's office, and, mistaking him for the partner responsible for what has happened, reviles him, the man of magic, with a few words and passes, sets him running about the floor on all fours and yelping like a dog. Professor Futvoye also offends the miracle-worker, with the result that he is turned into a one-eyed mule of hideous aspect ; and the drollest scene in the whole play is that in Mrs. Futvoye's drawing-room, in which the lady, aware of her husband's altered state, but desirous of concealing it from Mr. Pringle, who has called, sits at her embroidery as placidly as she can, while the Professor, unseen, is lashing out with his hind-legs in the room beyond, and making a most appalling noise. “ Couldn't you persuade him to see a vet ? ” mildly remarks Mr. Pringle, when the horrible truth has flashed upon him. And so the play goes on, the Djinn for ever trying to serve his benefactor, and only getting him into hotter water than before. At last, finding the world so different from the one he had known three thousand years ago, he begs to be put back into his bottle, sealed up, and dropped into the Thames. This wish Horace grants, having, however, first compelled his mysterious visitor to cause the Futvoyes, Mr. Wackerbath, and everyone else, save Pringle, to forget the humiliations to which they have been put. With the final discomfiture of Pringle, the reunion of Horace and Sylvia, and the restored

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friendliness of Wackerbath, the curtain falls upon as diverting a piece of nonsense as we have seen for a long time.

The acting honours at the Vaudeville were carried off by Mr. Rudge Harding in the part of Mr. Pringle. As will have been guessed from the foregoing, Pringle is not intended to be the leading part, but the actor made it so by the natural drollery and comic sincerity of his performance. Some of the funniest lines fell to him, and he delivered them with a quiet humour which again and again convulsed the house. His make-up, also, was excellent. Seldom have we seen on the stage a more consummate and unmistakable "smug." Mr. Lawrence Grosssmith as Horace had a long part, and probably a difficult one, as during almost the entire play he was expressing little more than comic display. The character, however, demanded more charm and natural gaiety than Mr. Grosssmith brought to bear upon it. The actor seemed to have adopted a somewhat thin and Cockneyish vein of humour; and at last it was found a little wearying. Mr. E. Holman Clark, on the other hand, as the Djinn, gave a most amusing study in the grotesque, and his appearance in the second act in a frock-coat, silk hat, and weirdly shaped trousers caused roars of laughter.

“NAN”

By Mr. John Masefield

The Royalty,
May 24th, 1908.

ODD tremors and quakes ! Mr. John Masefield certainly has a very pretty taste in horrors ; and, with his play “Nan,” he sent something very like shivers through an audience of the members of the Pioneers Society that filled the Royalty to its last seat. He did this, moreover, in spite of the fact that some of the incidents in the play had moved the spectators to irreverent laughter, while others had puzzled it into momentary stupefaction. For a dramatist who has let his audience escape from his control, suddenly to drag it back into a hushed, staring, rapt attention is no small feat ; and Mr. Masefield did this several times, and—most wonderful of all !—did it with touches that were largely metaphysical. Let us briefly outline his story. Nan Hardwick is the daughter of a man who has been hanged for stealing a sheep (the date of the play is 1810). She is living with an aunt, who uses her brutally, an uncle, who means well,

Nights at the Play

but is weak, and a cousin Jenny, who takes after her father. One of the Gloucestershire villagers, Dick Gurvil, loves her, proposes to her, and is accepted by the girl, who loves him passionately; but the aunt has intended her Jenny for the young man; and when she hears of the engagement she tells the story of Nan's father, the result being a prompt transfer of Dick's affections. Then comes the news from the Home Office that Hardwick had, after all, been hanged by a miscarriage of justice, and a bag of fifty sovereigns is handed to Nan by way of "compensation." Once more Dick's affections veer round; but, when Nan has proved with a question or two that it is her money rather than herself the young fellow is after, she puts an end to him with a knife, and staggers forth into the night to die.

Such is the main thread of the story. It is in the development and illumination of it that Mr. Masfield gets his great effects; particularly in a scene of quite exceptional power in the last act between Nan and Jenny. The latter had promised to be Nan's friend, but has proved a hypocrite and a sneak; and now, Nan, looking straight into Jenny's weak grey eyes, tells her she can read the mean little soul behind them; tells how, moreover, she sees her future life and degraded death—a creature of painted cheeks on a wretched bed; startles the girl, frightens her, and finally drives her away shrieking with terror. Such a scene as this is not for every

“ Nan ”

audience ; and, acted with perfect sincerity by Miss Lillah McCarthy as Nan, and Miss Mary Jerrold as Jenny, it proved as much as a house full even of Pioneers could bear with composure. Other incidents followed, among them the long-drawn-out and often quite incomprehensible ravings of a mad village fiddler ; but every now and then would be heard the terrified cries of the girl from the next room, and once more that disagreeable shiver ran through the house. Afterwards came the scene in which Nan stripped her lover of his robes of pretence, reduced him to the merest scarecrow of a man, and at last—so that no more women should be taken in by his insincerity and his sensuality—stabbed him twice in the stomach. Here again was a scene by no means calculated to send a thrill of æsthetic pleasure through any company of well-consorted playgoers. But it was real drama for all that, shot through with a horrible kind of truth. Acted splendidly by Miss McCarthy and Mr. A. E. Anson, it caused the Pioneers to sit fascinated, “ like birds the charming serpent draws.” Earlier in the play there had been a fine scene of another kind, that in which Dick first told his love. It struck us as beautifully written—a little too sensuous, perhaps, for some ears, but very much what such a scene may have been in real life between a lusty young countryman, who would not know much of shades of thought or refinements of expression, and a girl longing hungrily for tenderness and protection.

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These three scenes were the best in the play, and made it remarkable.

Some of the others were, as we have said, difficult to follow ; while yet others were stagey and artificial. The transfer in a moment of Dick's affection from Nan to Jenny was inconceivable ; while the scene in which the aunt interrupted a dance to tell the story of Nan's shame, at the conclusion of which the dance was resumed as though nothing had happened, had the look of a trick to ensure what is called an effective "curtain." Mr. Masefield can afford not to worry about his "curtains." The character of the aunt was also, we think, overdrawn. Charles Dickens, writing with his broadest pen and blackest ink, could hardly have composed a more loathsome figure—yet this woman was the trusted wife of a comparatively decent man, the mother of a feeble, but not wicked daughter, and a person of no little consideration in the village. Mrs. A. B. Tapping blackened every blot in a most self-sacrificing way, but there is no reason to believe that she went beyond the author's instructions in so doing. Another fine performance came from Mr. Horace Hodges as the uncle. Indeed, every part was well played ; and the effect of the whole thing will probably remain with the audience for a long time. For all that, we hope the author will not allow a taste for the horrible to grow on him.

SIR CHARLES WYNDHAM IN "THE MOLLUSC"

The Criterion Theatre,
October 15th, 1907.

THE mollusc in Mr. Hubert H. Davies' remarkably dainty comedy, "The Mollusc," is a certain Mrs. Baxter, daughter of a mother who had kept her bed for fifteen years out of sheer love of idleness, and of a father who had been unutterably indolent of mind and body and had "called it being a Conservative." For all her prettiness and lusty health, and the claims on her of two growing girls, a big house, and a dutiful husband, this Mrs. Baxter is incorrigibly lazy. Her whole attitude towards life is one of masterly inactivity. She does nothing herself that she can get her husband or Miss Roberts, the pretty governess, to do. Arranging flowers in a vase, for example, is a task quite beyond her. She can scarcely hold a vinaigrette to her dainty nostrils. She can only smile, and smile, and smile, and be a mollusc. Suddenly her brother Tom, from Colorado, comes to Mr. and Mrs. Baxter on a visit. Out in the West, among the

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swaying firs, the rushing torrents, and the mighty cañons, Tom has shaken off his own inherited share of the family "molluscry," and he has not been ten minutes with the Baxters before he discovers that the trouble in the house is his sister's laziness.

Aha! he will soon shake her out of that! "Leave her to me, my boy," he says to the husband. But, alas! he too discovers that there is a power of resistance in the inert person as strenuous as that in the energetic—that a fight with a Mrs. Do-nothing may prove as tough a task as one with a Mrs. Do-much; and before long he throws up the sponge. Then, something happens that shakes Mrs. Baxter out of herself in a twinkling. Poor Baxter, dependent on the governess for all the life and society he can get in his own house, shows a disposition to fall in love with her. The Mollusc discovers him in what appears to her a compromising interview with the young lady, and there and then shakes off her vapours, becomes a highly strenuous and devoted wife once more, and all ends happily for Mr. and Mrs. Baxter. And, as the gallant Tom has fallen in love with the governess, and finds his affection returned, all also ends happily for the other two characters in the play. Henceforth for Mrs. Baxter "the rest which is glorious is that of the chamois couched breathless in its granite bed, not of the stalled ox over his fodder." Ruskin's aphorism

Charles Wyndham in "The Mollusc"

might be the moral of Mr. Davies' charming play if anything so dull as a moral could be attached to so delicate a work of art.

Nothing prettier than this comedy has been seen in town lately, and its success is assured. When Mr. Haddon Chambers kept us interested in "The Tyranny of Tears" with only six characters, he was very properly credited with no mean achievement as a playwright. Mr. Davies has gone two better, and written a play that has not a dull moment with only four. The long-suffering husband, the high-minded young governess, the mollusc of a wife, and the strenuous brother from Colorado, are all most delicately composed. They "live," as the saying is. They talk naturally as well as wittily; and again and again the author devises a situation that surprises the house and convulses it with laughter. One of these comes at the end of the second act. Mrs. Baxter has suspicions of Miss Roberts. She must leave the house at once! At least, she must in a few days. She cannot go immediately, for Mrs. Baxter fears she is going to be ill, and after all—*how can she be ill without Miss Roberts?* This climax of "molluscry" left last night's audience laughing long after the curtain had ceased to rise and fall. There are a score of moments in the play as unexpected and as droll.

In the part of the sturdy brother, Sir Charles Wyndham gave one of his most delightfl

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performances. There are scenes of sheer farce for him in the first act, which he played with all the gaiety of his Bob Sackitt days; in the second and third there is comedy of the richest in his attempts to rouse his sister, and their abject failure; and just towards the end there is a love-scene with the governess, a little spun out, perhaps, in its opening, but very pretty in its close, and beautifully acted. All through the play, in fact, we had this masterly comedian at his best, and London theatre-goers know what entertainment that means. Miss Mary Moore, again, as the wife, had a part that fitted her like one of her own pretty gowns. She toyed with life with an exquisite daintiness. Miss Elaine Inescourt, as the governess, and Mr. Sam Sothern as the husband, completed the cast with two equally artistic and pleasant performances; and when all was over the audience "called" the company and the author, and cheered them to the echo.

MISS LENA ASHWELL IN "IRENE WYCHERLEY"

The Kingsway Theatre,
October 9th, 1907.

MISS LENA ASHWELL opened her career as a manageress with an evening none of those present will forget for many a long day. Not since the first night of "Iris" has a London audience been so stirred as was that at the Kingsway Theatre by two of the scenes in the new play, "Irene Wycherley," by a new author, Mr. Anthony P. Wharton, or moved to admiration of such extraordinarily fine acting. Critics of the London theatre are tired of saying how admirable this actor or that would have been in a worthier part—of mourning over clever men and women handicapped by a dramatist's futility. In connection with this production, at all events, this particular jeremiad has become blissfully impossible. Mr. Wharton has given his company recognisable human beings to impersonate, men and women who act and speak, not according to that detestable thing, theatrical convention, but in harmony with life itself; and, seizing

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their opportunities with a graceful enthusiasm, Miss Ashwell, and her brother and sister artists, showed us what English acting can be when it has the right material to work with. The story of the new play is in certain of its aspects an appalling one. Indeed, our only fear for its success arises from its immense realism. A play-going public fed almost exclusively on pretty fiction may shrink from the contemplation of stern logic and fact, even though served up with the relief, which Mr. Wharton supplies bountifully, of genuine wit and humour, both in the dialogue and in the characterisation. Any such display of a timid and selfish Philistinism would, however, be so deplorable that, for the credit of the capital, we shall not anticipate it.

The story is that of Mrs. Irene Wycherley, a high-minded young gentlewoman, who is married to "a devil." After four years of degradation, culminating in the discovery of a disgraceful liaison between her husband and a certain Mrs. George Cave (whose own husband has committed suicide), she has left him, bearing a scar upon her face the result of one of his assaults; and for about five years she has been living in London. A Roman Catholic, she has, of course, declined to divorce him, but the solicitations of his parents have failed to induce her to go back to him. In her lonely position she has accepted what appears to be the unselfish friendship of a young man, Harry Chesterton, and, just as she has

Lena Ashwell in "Irene Wycherley"

discovered, somewhat to her perturbation, that his friendship is love, a telegram is handed to her. Her husband has been nearly killed by a gun accident while out shooting, and she is implored to go down to him. She obeys; and in a few weeks Philip Wycherley, nearly blind, tremblingly weak, hideously scarred, and as savage a ruffian as ever, is able to rise from his bed and take his place in the dining-room.

The presence of his wife jars upon him, gets on his nerves. Every word she says irritates him. Why can't she be jolly—like Mrs. Charles Summers, for example, the pretty neighbour with the husband from the Colonies? "Ask her and her husband here," he roars. Irene sends off the letter, and they come; and two things are soon revealed—(1) that Mrs. Summers is no less a person than the late Mrs. Cave, and (2) that her Charlie, with his quiet eyes and smooth voice, has a deadly hate of Philip. Indeed, sitting with her father late at night discussing the situation in which she now finds herself, an idea suddenly strikes across the brain of Irene which blanches her—the idea that the gun which had so nearly killed Mr. Wycherley was not his own after all, but that of Mr. Charles Summers. Irene, in due course, discovers that Mrs. Summers is Mrs. Cave, and orders her from the house. Mr. Summers demands an explanation, divines that Wycherley is the man who caused his wife's former fall, and that, even in his present

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shattered condition, he is still making advances to her, and he shoots him again, this time with full effect, following it up by shooting himself; and it is upon this climax the curtain falls. Young Chesterton, however, has also been visiting in the house, and the one ray of light in the final catastrophe is the certainty that by and bye Irene will find happiness at last in rewarding him according to his desires and deserts.

This is by no means the whole of the story. It is only the more important part of it. Reference has been made above to two particular pieces of acting which thrilled the first night's audience to its centre. One of these was the almost dazed submission of Irene to a sudden hideous love-making on the part of her husband, and the cry and movement of disgust with which she at last put an end to it, leaving him a roaring beast again. It constituted one of the most painful experiences we have ever sat through in a theatre; but discomfort was soon lost in admiration of the acting of Miss Ashwell as the wife and Mr. Norman McKinnel as the husband; and a few moments later the curtain fell, amid a general clamour of applause that caused it to be raised again and again. The other was the wife's sudden indication of her suspicion of the real facts of the "gun accident." Miss Ashwell's acting in this scene was perfectly calm. The horror seemed to grow slowly in her

Lena Ashwell in "Irene Wycherley"

wide-dilating eyes. Then the hands expressed it. Then a low, tremulous whisper stole through the theatre—a whisper that sent a veritable shiver through a good many of us. The whole thing only lasted a few moments, but it was a piece of great acting. Indeed, from beginning to end, Miss Ashwell's performance was the finest thing she has done. The spiritual beauty of the injured wife, her womanly fascination, and a hundred moods of coquetry, scorn, joy, anguish, and horror were all expressed in the most striking way. Praise as high is due to Mr. Norman McKinnel, who, in the part of the husband, presented a dreadful figure, built up with countless little touches of ugliness and truth. Miss Frances Ivor's dignified Lady Wycherley, Mr. Dennis Eadie's very finished study of Irene's worldly but on the whole well-meaning father-in-law, and Mr. C. M. Hallard's manly Chesterton were flawless; as also were the performances of Miss Muriel Wylford as the vile Lilly Summers and Mr. Henry Vibart as the avenging husband. In fact, every part was acted admirably, and grateful as the company must be to the author for such parts, he may also be thankful for such players.

“DIANA OF DOBSON’S”

*Kingsway Theatre,
February 12th, 1908.*

MISS LENA ASHWELL has been well advised in turning to the comic muse for her second important production. It is good to be able to shudder now and then in a playhouse; but it is not good for a theatre to become exclusively identified with the creepy. As a work of dramatic art, Miss Cicely Hamilton’s play, “Diana of Dobson’s,” is greatly inferior to its predecessor. Its characters are less solidly composed; its development has far less of inevitability. But it is sentimental, topical, and above all, amusing; and, if only a few more of our dramatists would realise how much of the powder of Improbability a London audience will swallow with alacrity provided it be seasoned with the jam of Humour, there would be fewer dismal evenings for playgoers, and fewer theatrical box-offices wrapt in the silence of the sepulchre.

The new play opens in one of the dormitories of Dobson’s Drapery Emporium, where five of the fair assistants are going to bed. Realism

"Diana of Dobson's"

is to the fore. In preparing her hair for the night one of the damsels detaches a thick lock and, laying it on her knee, combs and brushes it with tender care. Another is even able to get so far in the process of disrobing as the entry into her nightgown. But it is all as innocent as it is amusing; and the worst that can be said of it is that it seems rather a cheap way of drawing laughter. A white arm or so—a gleaming shoulder—a pink vest—a peering foot—a warm, flannel, Evangelical-looking night-gown, as solemnising in its effect as the texts which the late M. Max O'Rell used to describe as an inevitable part of the furniture of the average English sleeping apartment! *Et voilà tout!* Nothing very shocking, you see, after all!

As they disrobe, the girls keep up a lively chatter. One of them, Diana Massingberd, is seething with rebellion at having to work fourteen hours a day for five shillings a week, minus fines; and is eloquent in denunciation of the forewoman, Miss Pringle, whom she ironically indicates as "The Pringle." Poor Diana seems to live in hot water. Dobson is her "putty-faced tyrant," Dobson's Emporium a "den," and "The Pringle" a beast! So she rattles on, fully prepared to "get the sack" at any moment. Instead, however, she receives a letter from a lawyer informing her that by the death of a kinsman she has inherited three hundred pounds! "O joy, O rapture unfore-

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seen!" She will leave Dobson's to-morrow! She will spend her three hundred on giving herself one crowded month of glorious life! "The Pringle" hears her, enters the room and is driven forth with a blast of plutocratic impudence. Hey for pretty dresses, admiration, and the Alps!

So much for the first act. The second takes us a long way across the map, but not very far with the play. Diana is masquerading at Pontresina as Mrs. Massingberd, a widow with "£300 a month," and a twinkle in her eyes: and Captain the Hon. Victor Bretherton (late Welsh Guards) is being urged by his mercenary aunt to propose. In the third act, still in the Upper Engadine, he screws up his courage and does so: whereupon "Mrs. Massingberd" tells him that instead of £300 a month her income has only been £300 for one month; that it is all spent; and that there is nothing left but for her to return to London and start at Dobson's again—if they will take her back. Victor is indignant. He is not a bad young fellow. He has not been aiming at her fortune. The mischievous eyes and the general charm have "bowled him over," and he really loves her after his fashion. But she has deceived him, and he tells her so: and, in reply, she reminds him with an energy a fighting Suffragette might envy that a woman who has worked for her living is at least as respectable as a man who has

“ Diana of Dobson’s ”

never done a day’s work in his life, could not do it if he tried, and is only a backboneless futility in the eyes of every self-respecting person! The Hon. Victor quails under the lash; Victorious Femininity gathers its rustling skirts around it and sweeps triumphantly from his presence: and down comes the curtain upon Act III amid a cheer from the men in the theatre and an ecstatic clapping from the ladies who have enjoyed seeing one of the “ tyrants ” put in his proper place. The last act takes place on the Embankment, in the wind of a bleak dawn. Victor is there penniless and in rags. He has been trying to earn his living: this is the result. Diana also is there, pinched, white, poverty-stricken. Nobody wants her—not even Dobson. But presently the young man explains that, appearances to the contrary, he still has his private income, about £600 a year; that he has only been trying to live without its help as an answer to her taunts in the Pontresina sitting-room; that he loves her for herself alone; and that he wants her to marry him. After that, of course, only one ending is possible, and the author gives it us.

As we have said, this is not real life. In the world of fact Victor would have obtained a berth somewhere, or his friends would have done it for him—the author makes him declare that he has none, but he has three even in the play; while Diana, with her gifts of speech, presence,

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and general capability, would surely have found a situation as companion, or, at the worst, as a general servant. But it makes an amusing comment. Sometimes the satire is a little too obvious. A baroneted tradesman introduced into the Pontresina scenes, who expects his title to help his business, is not very subtle or original sarcasm; while some jokes at the expense of the Cook's Tourist are as old as the hills. Up to the end of the third act the piece is, in fact, a rather roughly composed tract on the harsh conditions of labour and the ignominy of pampered laziness; while the fourth "ties up the sack" arbitrarily as well as sentimentally in making the hero's unearned increment a solution of the heroine's difficulties. But humour, like charity, covers a multitude of sins; and it was for the sake of the laughter in it that "Diana of Dobson's" had so hearty a welcome. The curtain had to be raised nine times after the third act; and at the finish the author was called and warmly cheered.

Miss Ashwell, so fine in tragic, is equally sincere in comedy, parts; and the joy with which she played out the farce in the Swiss hotel was most cleverly shown; while no other English actress could surpass her in the bitterness flung into the scenes at Dobson's, or the "rounding" on Victor in the third act. Mr. C. M. Hallard, handicapped by the futility of the character, acted earnestly and pleasantly as

“ *Diana of Dobson’s* ”

the lover ; and Mr. Dennis Eadie gave a finished sketch as the “ bounding ” baronet. Miss Frances Ivor as the farcically snobbish and mercenary aunt, Miss Ada Palmer as “ The Pringle,” Miss Beryl Mercer as a dreary old haunter of the Embankment, and Mr. Norman McKinnel, honourably sacrificing himself in the small part of a kindly police-constable, also provided valuable touches of comedy and character ; while the ladies impersonating the assistants in the opening scene undressed quite beautifully.

MISS MARIE LÖHR'S

LONDON DÉBUT

*Haymarket Theatre,
May 28th, 1907.*

As presented in English under the title of "My Wife" at the Haymarket Theatre, MM. Gavault and Charnay's play, "Josette, Ma Femme," impresses one as a fruity blend of the old art of playwriting and the new, of French customs and English, of comedy and farce. The opening scene, for instance, in which young Mr. Gibson Gore, with a lady's lap-dog under his arm, enters his friend Gerald Eversleigh's flat and proceeds *via* the dog, to lay the situation before the audience, is of very ancient design, new only in the canine part of it. The final scene, on the other hand, in which Gerald, left alone with his wife, turns the lights down at the sound of her father's arrival, and bids the butler inform that gentleman that "Mr. and Mrs. Eversleigh have retired," might have been devised by Pinero. In a similar way the play changes its social atmosphere from that of France to that of England and back again in the airiest way ;

Miss Marie Löhr's London Début

and, while the duel incident of the second act has a French comedy opening, its conclusion, with the "business" of the bandaged finger, is satiric British farce. Not even the most satisfied person in the theatre could admit that his or her knowledge of real life had been much advanced. No English gentleman would marry his young ward on the condition that the marriage was to be no marriage, and that in ten months he was to divorce her or she him so that she could marry the young fellow she really loves. Not even to enable her to come into her fortune would he so damage her prospects socially, and risk his own good name. Treated as farce, of course, such things would be normal enough; but Mr. Aubrey Smith, who impersonates the husband, is not by any means a farcical actor, but a gentleman of authority and dignity, whose proceedings have to be regarded seriously. In fine, if we are to enjoy "My Wife" we must bow the austere muse of Criticism from our presence as politely as we may, and surrender ourselves unquestioningly to the spell of two exceedingly attractive personalities.

Mr. Aubrey Smith is the handsome guardian, Gerald Eversleigh, aged apparently between thirty-five and forty; Miss Marie Löhr is the charming ward, Trixie Dupré, still in her teens. The pair make their farcical marriage, go to Switzerland for their sham honeymoon, and

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end by falling madly in love with each other. In the beginning of the play Gerald's main anxiety is to get rid of the young lady as quickly and as gracefully as may be ; while she, with a girl's mingled art and innocence, first fascinates him, then renders him jealous, and finally converts him into an ardent lover. And the audience took Miss Löhr to their hearts from the first. Those who remember Kate Bishop, of the old Vaudeville days, would expect a daughter of hers to have the undefinable thing called charm, but Miss Löhr has this and more. She played her long and very important part as though she had been acting for years instead of being practically a débutante. Her diction was admirable, most of her gesture expressive and easy, her facial play graphic. A gentler Pallas, she seems to have sprung into life fully armed. The whole performance was most pleasant to watch. At the same time it is to be hoped that the ovation she received at the finish will not spoil her, or set her thinking that she has mastered the technique of the stage from its Alpha to its Omega. She has, however, got as far as the Kappa, and she is young. She is, therefore, to be congratulated, and bigger things may be hoped of her in the future. We have already suggested that Mr. Smith shared her success. His support was most loyal, and his whole performance manly and charming. There was also a lot of good acting from others in the

Miss Marie Löhr's London Début

cast, notably from Mr. Fred Lewis in the part of Trixie's French papa, a very finished study, full of humour ; from Mr. H. Marsh Allen as the earlier lover of the heroine ; and from Mr. A. E. Matthews as the pathetically long-suffering young man who carts the lap-dog about.

MR. H. B. IRVING IN "THE LYONS MAIL"

*The Shaftesbury Theatre,
October 15th, 1908.*

IN the graceful little speech which Mr. H. B. Irving made to the audience at the Shaftesbury Theatre at the end of an exciting evening with "The Lyons Mail," he said: "If any of those present have seen this play before, we hope we have recalled pleasant memories to them"—and from several parts of the auditorium came cries of "You have!" The mere recalling of such memories, however, was facile enough. The simple announcement of the play on a poster would have done it. The important fact of the evening was that, even with vivid memories of Henry Irving pressing upon one all the time one could sit through the performance with genuine pleasure. Obviously it could not have been from those memories only that the gratification came: for, had the acting of Mr. Irving been seriously in conflict with them, the evening would have been one of torture. The general cheers, however, that followed the descent of

H. B. Irving in "The Lyons Mail"

the curtain after each act, and particularly after the second and third, proved that the audience had been moved to real admiration ; and, with the memory of his father's performance still so vivid, the evening must be chronicled as one of triumph for the son. We are not going to say that either the new Lesurques or the new Dubosc has the magnetism of the old. The one has not that pathos that really tore at the heart ; the other does not set one shivering with horror as Henry Irving's did in the garret scene, in which his aspect and his acting combined to compose one of the most appalling figures seen on the English stage since the days of Edmund Kean. But we saw quite enough to convince us that there is only one man before the present playgoing public who has the artistic right to play the two parts, and that man is Henry Irving's elder son.

Mr. Irving's Lesurques is brisker than his father's, and walks and talks more rapidly. When first we meet him he seems gayer. He bears himself like a gentleman prepared to enjoy the bottle of wine for which he pays his five francs to the boy at the Lieursaint inn ; and he has the prompt air of a man who has made a fortune while still in the prime of life, and has risen to distinction from somewhat obscure beginnings. Henry Irving's Lesurques seemed haunted from the first with tragical premonitions ; not so the Lesurques of last night. Consequently, when

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the crash came, and he found himself confronted with witness after witness charging him with robbery and murder, his bewilderment and horror were no less dramatic. At the Lyceum we were shown a dreamy, deeply religious idealist suddenly brought face to face with something revolting. At the Shaftesbury we saw a man full of the joy of life brought low, a man happy in his daughter's affection and in his love for her, proud of the fact that he had been able, as he thought, to secure a competency for his aged father, and, above all, an honest and successful merchant. The Lyceum Lesurques, driven almost to despair by the damning evidence of his own father, was wont suddenly to pause, and then, his face lit with almost saintly rapture, to cry, "God sees us both, and knows it is a lie." At the Shaftesbury there was no pause, and the words came rushing forth with the energy born of a pride that had been cut to the quick. The effect was different, the consistency was the same. As the scene proceeded, the earnestness of the actor deepened. The haughty repudiation of the idea of suicide was one of the finest things of the evening; and the attitude and look of the man as the curtain fell—standing pale and alone, with eyes directed upwards and a hand stretched to heaven as if for help—made a figure of memorable beauty.

We should have said that of the two parts the Lesurques was the harder to play, yet Mr.

H. B. Irving in "The Lyons Mail"

Irving was more completely successful in it than as Dubosc, though here, too, his acting was full of interest. The husky voice was well done, so also was the curious jaunty walk which was such a piece of horrible grotesque in his father's impersonation; and there was an ugly evilness in the narrow oblique eyes and the thin flexible lips. We missed, however, the awful strength with which Henry Irving made the garret scene so appalling, the diabolic power which seemed to add feet to his stature and make him gigantic, a terrifying figure with a livid face that had Hell in every line of it. At the Shaftesbury the drunken wretch seemed for a time to have lost his power with his sobriety. At the same time, we think that this effect may possibly have been caused by the fact that Mr. Irving was not quite so audible early in this scene as he had been through the preceding part of the play. It is important that every word even of his bemused mutterings should be distinctly heard; and no doubt in future performances this defect will be remedied. When that is done the full value of his acting will be attained, and his Dubosc should be a worthy artistic complement of his exceedingly fine Lesurques.

It was a great pleasure to see Mr. Frank Tyars once more in his old part of the elder Lesurques, and to find him playing it as well as ever. He was one of Henry Irving's loyalest and most trusted confrères, and his presence under the

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flag of his old chief's son will be as agreeable to the public as it must be to himself. And may we say here with what pleasure we saw Mr. Meredith Ball conducting the orchestra?—another name that took us back to the old magic nights. Mr. Irving is also happy in his leading lady, Miss Dorothea Baird. In the part of Jeanette she had not much to do, but she did it prettily and pathetically; and she was also seen to advantage in the little drama, “The Sergeant of Hussars,” with which the programme opened. The remainder of the company worked well; and the scenery and incidental music—the latter, by the way, plays a very important part in this, as it did in all the Lyceum melodramas—were just as they used to be in the old days. The house was crowded with an audience that was as brilliant as it was enthusiastic; and we trust that the events of this very interesting evening will prove to have inaugurated another long and affectionate relationship between London playgoers and an Irving.

“DON QUIXOTE”

By Mr. G. E. Morrison

*The Coronet Theatre,
March 4th, 1908.*

IN writing his drama, “Don Quixote,” Mr. G. E. Morrison (who has been assisted in the construction by Mr. R. P. Stewart) has not attempted a dramatisation of Cervantes’ epic. He has, rather, founded a play upon it—a very different matter. He has taken some of his incidents from the book and added some of his own ; but he has done nothing contrary to the spirit of his great original. And he and his collaborator are particularly to be congratulated on the way in which they have provided a love-interest for their hero without deviating from their perfect loyalty to Cervantes. Some writers would have materialised Dulcinea del Toboso, and written long and tender love-scenes for the knight and the lady, forgetful of the fact that the patronesses of the knights-errant were generally as inaccessible to their champions as they were beautiful. Those picturesque gentlemen, for example, took good care not to drape

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their wives' scarves on their shields. The constructors of the play which Mr. Benson presented at the Coronet Theatre have appealed to our sentimental weakness with something a great deal more in accordance with the book. They have taken the figure of Antonia Quixano, the foolish gentleman's niece, and breathed into it a devotion so tender that its manifestation runs through the play like a vein of gold, supplying an "interest" quite as appealing, and in every way as sympathetic as any love-interest of the usual kind could possibly have been. From the first scene to the last the love of Antonia for her uncle never wavers in its warm womanliness and its poetical purity.

The loyalty to Cervantes shown in the composition of the figure of Antonia is still more strikingly displayed in the treatment of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance himself. He says and does wild things, but always in the grand manner. His ideas and his diction are elevated and stately. He raves so eloquently in the glorification of war that one of the listeners turns and whispers to another, "Is this madness?" He would drive the Moors from Spain with half a dozen other knights, each a man who "Could with one sunlit sweep of his swift sword, flash out the life of half a thousand Moors!" Even when he is being whirled round by the windmill (an incident which the audience does not see), he is repre-

"Don Quixote"

sented as appearing to the miller "some struggling moonlit thing that shone like silver." An audience does not giggle at such a simile as that. He addresses the Duchess and the ladies of her Court in a language statelier and more poetical than their own. Flouts and indignities pass by him as the idle wind which he regards not. He accepts his defeat in combat with his eyes fixed on Heaven ; and he dies like a pitiful, Christian gentleman. In the play, in fine, as in the book, he is an extraordinarily strange and lovable figure.

And Mr. F. R. Benson, in the part, gave one of the best performances we have seen from him. The character must appeal to him with rare force for him to interpret it so subtly. In his absurdest moments, the knight was never presented as a buffoon or as anything approaching one. There was a scene in which he picked up a basin, mistook it for the golden helmet of Mambrino and proudly placed it on his head, without losing a shred of his pathetic dignity. When, in the presence of the Duchess, the merry ladies of the Court drew the stool away from him so that he stumbled to the floor, the audience's chief feeling, even while they laughed, was one of regret that ladies-in-waiting should behave so ill. The simple piety, romantic extravagance, and tenderness of heart of the man were all made clear ; and there was nothing astonishing in the love of Antonia for him, the

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devotion of Sancho Panza, or the final remorse of the Duke for the pranks he had permitted to be played on him.

The Sancho Panza of Mr. George Weir was another delight ; a piece of absolute truth. The audience revelled in it ; and Cervantes himself would have nodded approval of that slow smile of bewilderment, the puzzled scratchings of the head, the rustic voice and aspect, the dog-like affection for the half-witted master, and the truth of his grief as he knelt beside his corpse. Nor was the Antonia of Miss Helen Haye unworthy association with these two fine performances, being perfectly sincere, and in many ways beautiful and tender. In short, Mr. Morrison has been able to inspire his interpreters to work of very high quality ; and that is one of the best proofs of the strength and seriousness of the play.

“WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS”

By Mr. J. M. Barrie

The Duke of York's,
September 3rd, 1908.

ARE we ever again going to see a play with a hero—a man breasting the blows of circumstance, and grappling with his evil star, and reaching Fortune's crowning slope? Is woman always to be the protagonist? In the middle acts of “The Admirable Crichton” we were shown a Man; but the genuine “heroes” created by our dramatists since then could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. We had hoped that perhaps in Mr. Barrie's new play we were going to be introduced to one, a being who would set every man in the theatre throwing back his head saying—as even stern soldiers are said to have done as they left the presence of William Pitt—“He made me feel a braver man.” Ah! dream too bright to last! Mr. Barrie is still sitting at the feet of Woman, adoring her superiority of every kind, moral and intellectual;

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and the play over which the men in the Duke of York's Theatre (with every credit to themselves) roared themselves hoarse last night teaches little more than that even one of the most virile of men may become no better than a nullity once the wit, sympathy, and tact of his loving wife are withdrawn. So be it! Thanks to the author's art, it is, at any rate, a lesson very pleasant in the learning.

The heroine of "What Every Woman Knows" is one Maggie Wylie, a demure little Scots lassie, with old-fashioned curls and twenty-seven birthdays. Her father and her brothers would be glad to see her married, but she has "no charm," and wooers are not forthcoming. One night, however, a fellow named John Shand—a railway porter during the summer, and a student at Glasgow University in the winter—comes stealthily in through the Wylies' parlour window, not to burgle, but to enjoy a few hours' clandestine study of the Wylie library; and the men of the family, catching him in the act, cause him to sit down, and there and then make him a proposition. They know him to be a smart fellow, one who will "get on" in the world; and they offer him £300 so that he may complete his University course comfortably, on the understanding, however, that he is to marry Maggie at the end of five years, if she wishes him to. And, after a sufficient assertion of his native pride, he consents. So far, John

“What Every Woman Knows”

Shand has been the chief figure in the play, and the demure, homely little woman sitting by the fire, knitting a sock, seems a person of very little importance, though the observant spectator may have noted that every word she has said was curiously to the point, every action significant, every glance charged with meaning. But this was only the first act of Mr. Barrie's play.

In the second, six years have elapsed, and John is not only an M.A., but an M.P. He fancies he has been master of his fate and captain of his soul; and no one so “cocks him up” in the belief as little Maggie; but anyone can see, with half an eye, that she has been doing it all. When he marries her, brings her to London, and takes his place as a Scots Unionist (the portrait of Mr. Balfour hangs near the fire-place), she gives him all his ideas, which are the gold of his speeches; and yet does it so tactfully that he steadily regards himself as an inspired creature. And when he becomes infatuated with the beautiful Lady Sybil Lazenby, and she with him, the demure little wife plays her master-stroke. Seemingly accepting the situation, she gets her friend the Comtesse de la Brière to invite the lovers to her country cottage for a fortnight. At the end of that fortnight the inspired and gifted John is not only wearied to death of Lady Sybil, but has been told by a distinguished member of the Party that a speech

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he has just prepared and proposes delivering at a great meeting at Leeds, is lacking in his customary originality and power. This latter has been a breath-bereaving blow ; and when Maggie reappears he receives another, for he is made to realise that it is she who has helped him up the ladder and placed him where he is. She does not tell him so herself. On the contrary, she still flatters him, and pats him on the shoulder, not over-familiarly. But his eyes are opened, and when at last we leave them they are in each other's arms. She has just told him that if only she could make him laugh their life together would be so much easier ; but it is part of his pride that he has never laughed in his whole life. No doubt the little wife has regaled him with many a jest that was too clever for him to see ; but she makes one more effort, this time a poor, feeble little joke such as one would regale a child with. "I believe the first woman was made not out of one of Adam's ribs," she murmurs, "but out of his funny-bone." And at that John Shand, M.A., M.P., Lord and Master of Earth, the hope of his Party, probably one of the hopes of his country, condescends to smile, then to laugh, and finally to fling his arms aloft and howl aloud in his delight. Alas ! poor wretch—or happy wretch ! He does not know it, but Maggie has got him now for ever more. She has made him laugh. His humiliation is complete. And, as Mr. Barrie has now finished

“ *What Every Woman Knows* ”

his lesson and driven his moral home, there is nothing left but to bring down the curtain, which accordingly descends amid a roar of cheers.

If its issue may be described—not ungallantly, we trust—as small, the wit and charm of the play are great. Mr. Barrie’s gentle irony, that pierces without stinging, is one of the most valuable assets of our modern stage; and in “*What Every Woman Knows*” it comes flashing out again and again. All through the first act, and again in the fourth, he is at his best—full of the most delightful surprises. In the second we have a scene of popular excitement in one of Shand’s committee-rooms after the declaration of the poll that has sent him to Westminster, and it is splendidly stage-managed; but the best part of the act comes when the crowd has melted away, and he and Maggie discuss their future in a scene that is now humorous, now poignant, and always full of the Barrie charm. The third act brings the Lady Sybil episode to the front, and is, we think, rather less effective than the others, doubtless because Lady Sybil herself is not made very interesting by the author. Evidently Shand was not the man *she* was to rule. He was Maggie’s man. Some other poor, self-satisfied egoist will doubtless one day fall under the influence of Lady Sybil and be unconsciously lifted on to the plane of great achievement. The fourth act, as has been said, gives us Mr. Barrie in his happiest vein.

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As usual, in the case of an important London "production," the acting was highly finished. Miss Hilda Trevelyan played the part of Maggie with rare delicacy and sureness of touch ; and Mr. Gerald du Maurier merged himself with equal completeness in the part of John Shand. These are the two principal parts, and the actor and actress made them "live." Lady Tree brought wit of her own to a very wittily composed character, that of the Comtesse ; and her rapturous ejaculation on hearing, early in the play, that John Shand had once scraped boilers, "Scraping boilers ? *What fun men have !*" remains with us a joyful memory. Miss Lillah McCarthy, in the difficult part of Lady Sybil, and Messrs. Henry Vibart, Sydney Valentine, and Edmund Gwenn, as the Wylie father and sons, also gave careful studies ; and Mr. Norman Forbes impersonated the leading member of the Party with tact and authority. The piece was staged with Mr. Charles Frohman's customary effectiveness ; and both the grim Scots interiors and the daintier English ones seemed precisely right. Miss Trevelyan's reception at the end of the evening was of the kind described as "tremendous."

“HANNELE”

By Gerhardt Hauptmann

*The Scala Theatre,
April 12th, 1908.*

CHRONICLERS have told us that when Gerhardt Hauptmann's "Hannele" was first played, fifteen years ago, it attracted the attention of at least three Kings. It has not, hitherto, in London attracted the attention of one manager.* Even at the Court, under the Vedrenne-Barker regime, it failed to get a hearing, and we only know of two performances of it in this city, one at the Royalty Theatre four years ago, in its original German, with Elsa Steele as Hannele and Hans Andresen as Mattern; and one last night at the Scala Theatre by the little society calling itself The Play Actors—a society, by the way, financially poor, but in ideals, if we mistake not, very rich, and therefore deserving of encouragement and support. Some of the Play Actors' recent ventures in contemporary English drama have not been particularly useful to anybody; but a

* Since this article was written "Hannele" has been presented at His Majesty's Theatre under the direction of Sir Herbert Tree.

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little while ago it presented "La Gioconda" in English, an enterprise which doubtless helped some people to form an opinion of D'Annunzio as a dramatist. It has also given, in English, the second act of Beaumarchais' "Marriage of Figaro," and now it has produced this tremendous dramatic pamphlet of Hauptmann, and presented it with as perfect a sincerity as the German company displayed four years ago. Wherefore we are grateful to the Play Actors.

It must, in fairness to our theatrical managers, be admitted that "Hannele" is scarcely a play that clamours for production. Its story is too harrowing, its presentment of the terrestrial and the celestial too "realistic," and perhaps its lesson a little too pronounced for the average playgoer. And yet it is one of the most impassioned and impassionating dramatic works of our time. On the surface, its story is almost elementary in its simplicity. Hannele, the step-daughter of a drunken ruffian, Mattern, has run away from home, and attempted to drown herself in the smithy pond, but has been rescued by a forester and brought to the village poor-house to die. The doctor finds her body covered with scars, and another of the characters remembers that when her dead mother was prepared for the grave she was in a similar condition—the work of the same inhuman devil. And, left alone for a few minutes, the child has visions in the dark. The form of her step-

“ Hannele ”

father stands beside the bed roaring and threatening, until she is almost insane with terror ; then that of the dead mother appears, having come from Heaven to bid her child be of good cheer. Angels of light, with shining wings, gather about her and tell her of the joys that are in store ; and when they have vanished, and she sees a figure shrouded in black sitting in the opposite corner of the room, his hands folded over a great sword, and his eyes fixed steadfastly upon her, she knows it is Death. Finally, the Saviour Himself appears, surrounded with beatific forms ; and amid a chorus of melodious song, she is received into Heaven.

As we have said, it all made a very great commotion fifteen years ago. Kings in their council-chambers displayed grave anxiety as to its “ tendency,” and it was only after a significant pause that the German clergy made up their minds that upon the whole it made for triumphant orthodoxy. For our own part we find it a bitter and disturbing comment on a social system of which such matters as the torture of Hannele and her mother, the degraded wickedness of Mattern, and the general sordid vice and poverty of what we call the “ submerged tenth ” are seemingly an inevitable part, and a system in which all the happiness that can be assured to even its most innocent victims must be found in the life to come. We may be wronging Hauptmann, but that is how the play

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strikes us ; and, viewed in that light, one comes away from it possessed with a sorrow and anger beyond expression in words. We cannot recall any other modern drama which so rings the alarm in the chambers of the soul. The realism of it varies, but never ceases. Its opening scenes, with the denizens of the poorhouse squabbling and chuckling, make the spectator feel ashamed that such things should be ; and the figure of the stepfather is nothing less than appalling. In contrast with these types is the schoolmaster Gottwald, whose pupil the child has been, and whose tender ministrations help largely to rob death of its sting. When the Saviour appears it is noticed that His face is that of the dominie ; and there were critics in Germany who found profanity in this ! Surely all it means is that the character of the schoolmaster is of the saintliest, as, indeed, it is. The critics who exclaimed at this rather remind us of an ingenious gentleman who, immediately after the death of Tennyson, wrote to the Press suggesting that the Pilot mentioned in the last verse of " Crossing the Bar " was Arthur Henry Hallam ! Such critics are like adversity—their uses are sweet. They make for laughter. And, as there is very little to laugh over in " Hannele," one is grateful to such persons for providing " comic relief."

The performance by the Play Actors was an exceedingly fine one. The version played was that of Mr. William Archer, not the least of

“ *Hannele* ”

that gentleman's services to the cause of the intellectual theatre. The part of Hannele was most pathetically acted by Miss Winifred Mayo, with whom the only fault one could find was that the smile with which she received the consolations of her mother, the angels, and the Redeemer had so little radiance and rapture in it. Her face was too uniformly sad. In the character of Gottwald, and afterwards in that of the Saviour, Mr. H. H. Hignett acted with perfect tenderness and dignity. Mr. C. F. Collings played with great intensity the scenes in which Mattern appears; and Miss Cicely Hamilton made a memorable figure of the dead mother. Other sincere performances came from Mr. Fewlass Llewellyn as the Forester, Mr. Lewis Willoughby as the Doctor, and Miss Edyth Olive as a Sister of Mercy. Indeed, there was not a part that was not well played. A word of praise is also due to the skill with which the various supernatural effects were carried out, and to the general management of Mr. Arthur Applin; and another to the very expressive music which had been composed by Mr. Hubert Bath as an accompaniment to certain parts of the play.

“THE BLUE BIRD”

By M. Maurice Maeterlinck

*The Haymarket,
December 8th, 1909.*

M. MAURICE MAETERLINCK's fairy play, "The Blue Bird," received with unbounded enthusiasm at the Haymarket Theatre, is unlike any other fairy play acted in London within our memory. If there is any recently acted piece with which we should at all be disposed to classify it, it would be "Hannele," though that would be only for the reason that both plays deal with some of the issues of life and death as seen from the standpoint of the imaginative child. There the similarity ends. "Hannele" sets one shivering with horror and anger. "The Blue Bird" is a sort of exquisite melody in a minor key which sends one away happy. It has very little of the boisterous drollery of "Peter Pan," and it is miles away from "Pinkie and the Fairies." Indeed, the only doubt we entertain with regard to it is as to whether it is not a little too deep for English children. The first night's audience at the Haymarket received it with roars of delight,

“ *The Blue Bird* ”

but, then, it was an audience of grown-ups. The children of M. Maeterlinck's country are, from a tender age, far more familiar with what we may call the things of the Spirit than is the average English youngster. It is the same in Ireland; and both there and in Belgium the explanation lies in the fact that the Church has the children peculiarly in her care. The average Irish boy would argue his young English brother's head off in ten minutes on a good many questions of metaphysics. Consequently, to Irish and Belgian children this exquisite fantasy of the wanderings of the little brother and sister, Tytyl and Mytyl, through the Land of Memory, the Kingdoms of the Past and of the Future, the City of the Dead, and the Palace of Night, in search of the Blue Bird that stands for happiness, would be in harmony with much that they have been taught. To the average English youngster the story will come as a revelation of strange things, very curious and beautiful, and perhaps occasionally a little too sad. We can, however, honestly say that we have never seen a dramatic entertainment to which we would with so much pleasure and confidence take those keen and exacting little playgoers who will belord it over us so irresistibly when the Christmas holidays come. Given someone to explain what is, here and there, a little difficult, and “ *The Blue Bird* ” becomes an ideal entertainment for children.

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The first scene is as good as any. The brother and sister creep out of bed to watch a party across the road through the windows. Presently an old woman enters, the Fairy Berylune ; and gradually the room fills with a throng of enchanting incarnations. The dog Tylo and the cat Tylette walk on their hind-legs and talk like human beings, and while Tylo is all affection and loyalty, Tylette, alas ! is all selfishness and treachery. The Fire becomes a demonic figure, the Loaves out of the bread-pan dance this way and that, the twelve Hours float radiantly in through the mysterious opening door of the grandfather's clock, and Bread, Sugar, Milk, Water, and Light all join in the hurly-burly. And, at last the little couple are dispatched by the fairy on their quest of the Blue Bird, with Tylo and Tylette to bear them company, and Light to keep a friendly eye on them.

In the Land of Memory Tylyl and Mytyl meet their grandfather and grandmother, and their little brothers and sisters who have died ; and find them just as they were in real life. The joy of the meeting is mutual. In the Forest at night the trees and animals threaten them with death by way of avenging the wrongs they have themselves suffered at the hands of man—and only the appearance of Light saves them. In a graveyard they await with fear a rising of the dead, and lo ! when the graves open and the

"The Blue Bird"

"dead" issue forth, it is only to carpet the whole place with lilies. "Where are the dead?" asked little Mytyl, looking at the flowers. "There are no dead," replies Tytyl, looking also.

In the Kingdom of the Future they meet with the troops of children who have not yet been born on earth, and find most of them longing for the summons; so much so that when Time arrives in his galley to bear a dozen down to the earthly mothers who are awaiting them there is a general rush for places. And as the joyously laden ship passes from sight, there is heard, as though issuing from the depths of the abyss, a distant, faint, swelling chorus of gladness and expectation. "What is that?" asks Tytyl of Light. "It is not the children singing. It sounds like other voices." And the answer comes: "Yes, it is the song of the mothers coming out to meet them."

So the story goes on to its end—which we shall leave our young friends to find out for themselves, not spoiling their pleasure by revealing it here. The author's piety, imagination, and tenderness play delicately all the while. Fancy seems to catch light from fancy. Here and there, too, comes a refreshing little flash of humour, as when one of the unborn children, noticing a hat on Tytyl's head, asks him what it is, and he replies, "Oh, a hat is a thing you say 'How do you do?' with." And Tylo, the dog, is a joy throughout; he, at any rate, will

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be enormously popular with M. Maeterlinck's young English friends. So also will Tytyl and Mytyl themselves, particularly as they happen to be impersonated by two very clever and charming little girls, Olive Walter and Pauline Gilmer. Mr. Ernest Hendrie is the dog, quite unlike a dog, but very "sympathetic" and amusing; and Mr. Norman Page the cat, sly, sharp, and vindictive; while in the part of the Fairy Berylune it was pleasant to see again upon the stage that accomplished actress, Miss Carlotta Addison, of whom many of us have such refreshing memories. In other parts we had such players as Mr. William Farren, Mr. J. Fisher White, Mr. C. V. France, Mr. Edward Rigby, Miss Doris Lytton, and Mr. H. R. Hignett; while scenery that was never merely spectacular, always charming, and often poetical, and a deal of felicitous music from the pen of Mr. Norman O'Neill, helped to complete the illusion. Over it all, too, one felt the presence of a poetical directorship; and this is where Mr. Herbert Trench, and his "producer," Mr. E. Lyall Swete, come in for their share of the credit of one of the most beautiful and refined children's entertainments of modern times.

MISS JULIA MARLOWE AND
MR. E. H. SOTHERN IN
"THE SUNKEN BELL"

The Waldorf Theatre,
April 22nd, 1907.

ENGLISHMEN who were in Berlin in the winter of 1896, or who were in communication with friends there, will remember the convulsion caused in the German literary world by the production that December of Gerhardt Hauptmann's play, "Die Versunkene Glocke," the columns of the newspapers that were filled with it, the pamphlets published interpreting it this way and that, and the discussions that, for the time, turned half the clubs and drawing-rooms of the city into intellectual battle-fields. That storm has died away ; and, although the meaning of the play is still a matter of controversy wherever it is produced for the first time, the beauty of its poetry and the vivid force of its chief scenes have become matters of general acceptance. At the Waldorf Theatre, in Mr. C. H. Meltzer's admirable version, it was presented last night by

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two of the most distinguished American players of the day, Mr. E. H. Sothern and Miss Julia Marlowe; and a brilliant audience received it with enthusiasm at the end of each act. At times, however, even in the stalls, there had been signs that so far a flight into the realm of the superhuman was beyond the capacity of some of those present. The London stage has, indeed, of late been a poor preparative for the acceptance of such a play. At the best of times, the average Londoner finds the mysticism of "Hamlet" carries him quite as far as he cares to venture from the shore of material things. Hauptmann's bark goes sailing across the ocean to other worlds altogether.

In writing "The Sunken Bell," Hauptmann, who was then only in his thirty-third year, shook off the influence of Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf, whose main object as literary artists had apparently been to shock the good Berliners with works that involved a jettison of every moral and literary restraint. In such unpleasant plays as "Before Sunrise" and "Lonely Lives," and even in much of "The Weavers," the young dramatist had painted pictures of society which Holz himself would not have been ashamed to father. But "The Sunken Bell" proved something very different. Its pages were found to be aglow with such poetry as had not been heard on the Berlin stage for many a long day. Its wood nymphs, fauns, and goblins were as

“ *The Sunken Bell* ”

“ alive ” as its transformed husband and tragic wife. The medieval superstitions, still so dear to the German heart, were welcomed back in it ; and beneath all the clashings of criticism lay a transport of public gratitude, over the return of Poetry to the German stage.

The story of the bell-founder who, up among the mountains, meets an elfin incarnation of Joy, whose eyes lure him from the path of Duty in the valley below ; of the tragedy of the deserted wife’s death that drags him back to the village ; and of the final return to the mountains to die, is a familiar one. There is something of it in “ *Tannhäuser*,” more of it in “ *The Master-Builder*.” Here, bewitched by the nymph *Rautendelein*, the craftsman feels strong enough to play with Heaven itself. Wife, children, and Church are all forgotten at the touch of the girl’s lips :

“ Dost thou bend down to me ? Then with love’s arms,
Do thou release me from this cruel Earth,
Whereunto the hour nails me, as to a cross—
Release me ! For thou canst—I know thou canst.
And, with thy tender hands, pluck off the thorns
That crown my head—no crown ! Love—only Love ! ”

His prayer is answered. Under her mysterious influence he draws strength and new rapture with each living breath :

“ It is as though the very youth of May
Gladdened my heart and streamed into my being,

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I feel it in my arm—'tis hard as steel ;
And in my hand, that, as the eagle's claw,
Clutches at empty air, and shuts again,
Wild with impatience to achieve great deeds."

Nature has visited him with an auroral radiance. Love and infinite hope are at work within him. He will do such things as man ne'er did before to the glory of God and the service of humanity ! He has attained to perfect clarity of mind and physical strength, and lives and works in a transport of exultation ! But at the very height of his joy comes the call from the valleys—his two children bearing an urn filled with their dead mother's tears ; and at the sight of them he suddenly turns and curses the girl as a temptress. The conflict between Joy and Duty is over. Duty has prevailed. And broken-hearted, the bell-founder goes back to the old life and its claims. It seems to us a pessimistic story, though others may read it differently and find it quite the reverse. The poet has, perhaps, deliberately left his meaning far from clear.

As to the gratitude we owe to Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe for bringing the work to London there should be no two opinions. They have, moreover, produced it beautifully. The scenery, effects, and stage-management were all up to the most artistic standard, while the interpretation was distinguished by intelligence, culture, and considerable dramatic skill. Mr.

“ *The Sunken Bell* ”

Sothorn, as the bell-founder, was an impressive tragic figure ; and although in some of the long speeches he now and then lost his grip of the audience, it was only for a moment, while the scenes of passionate emotion were rendered with genuine power. Miss Marlowe's acting in the very difficult part of the nymph showed more effort, but she has a beautiful voice, and an expressive face, and will probably make a greater impression in some of the plays that are to follow. We did not care for the incidental music with which the progress of the play was followed—not on account of anything wrong in the music itself, which was charming and always appropriate, but because this sort of thing always seems to us out of place except in a Christmas pantomime. If author and actors cannot make the scenes “tell” without music, something is wrong which an orchestra will not repair. On the present occasion this particular assistance was more than once a gratuitous distraction.

“JEANNE D’ARC”

*Waldorf Theatre,
April 24th, 1907.*

THERE were “voices in the air” at the Waldorf last night when the story of Joan of Arc was being told. In all history, in all literature, there is none more astounding; and, beneath its spell, a fashionable audience once more greeted Mr. E. H. Sothern and Miss Julia Marlowe with a very *unfashionable* enthusiasm. The version presented was that of Mr. Percy Mackaye, a sound piece of work often rising to rhetorical and even to poetical power. The following from one of the Maid’s early descriptions of her “visions” is a fair instance of its quality:

“Out there—beyond: in the wide land beyond!
And there were thousands flashing in the sun
Beneath dark walls and mighty battlements,
And all their shining limbs were stiff with steel;
And rank by rank they rattled as they marched . . .
And I rode with them clad in silver mail
From heel to head upon a snow-white horse,
And all my oriflammes were painted fair
With lilies and the Rising of Our Lord;
For we were marching ’midst a war of bells
Towards a great cathedral.”

“*Jeanne d’Arc*”

Through the tragedy’s five acts we follow La Pucelle from the field of Domrémy to the King’s castle at Chinon, the sieges of Orleans and Troyes, the coronation pageant at Rheims, the prison at Rouen, and the end. We see the Lorraine girl standing beneath the trees on her father’s land, as she stands in the picture by Bastien Lepage, with dilated eyes, listening to the voices of angels and knights in armour, whose forms glimmer through the leaves. And in later scenes we find her a saint, a fury, a simple child, inspiring the wretched Dauphin with flashes of courage, leading her soldiers to victory, and enjoying the visible protection of Messengers from Heaven.

It has all been familiar to us from the days of our childhood ; yet what a thrill there is in it still, and will be until Science has finally atrophied our hearts and our imaginations ! And may our ashes be feeding the violets before that day arrives !

In dealing with the Jeanne of Miss Julia Marlowe we feel conscious of a difficulty. Again and again she gave us that rare sensation, the cold wave over the cheek. There is a certain note in her voice, sounded at moments of intense passion, which never failed to reach our emotional centre ; and, as it was touched at least half a dozen times in each of the first three acts, we spent a somewhat exhausting evening. On the other hand, there were often monotony of

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elocution and artificiality of gesture and facial play. And then, suddenly, at the sight of an angel in a tree, or at the sound of some mysterious "horns of elf-land faintly blowing," would come that cry of ecstasy and rapture, ringing its alarm through one's moral being, until we felt like leaping from our seat and shouting aloud! A good many others present evidently suffered in the same way, for the cheering at the end of the first three acts was altogether beyond the ordinary. In the quieter scenes of the rest of the play we found the actress always interesting, for she was always thinking, but our emotions were under satisfactory control. This is not a full summing-up of an exciting evening's impressions. But the view expressed after seeing her in the Hauptmann play, namely, that other parts would bring out new sides of a valuable artistic equipment, has been justified by her Jeanne D'Arc, which proved to be a far finer and less mannered performance than her Rautendelein.

Mr. Sothern's part, that of the Duc d'Alencon, gave him scant opportunities, but what there were he made the most of, and he was a fine and chivalrous figure throughout. Once again the play was beautifully put on the stage; and, with the exception of a somewhat cacophonous chorus in the opening of Act I, in which the singers got very much out of tune, only praise of the production

“*Jeanne d’Arc*”

is possible. But Miss Marlowe has become more interesting; and that we take to be the most important gain from this particular performance.

"TWELFTH NIGHT"

*Waldorf Theatre,
April 26th, 1907.*

MISS JULIA MARLOWE'S Viola does not banish our memories of the stately figure Miss Ada Rehan presented in the part, the grandeur of that great actress's gestures, or the noble music of her diction in the scenes with Orsino and Olivia. Nor is it charged with poetry of speech and aspect as was that of Miss Ellen Terry. Judged, however, on its own merits, it is a varied and delightful performance, with, perhaps, more of the spirit of comedy in it than of the spirit of romance. Even in the scenes with the Duke there was generally a smile hovering near the actress's lips and in her expressive eyes, as though the humour of "the lovely garnish of a boy" in which she was masquerading was ever-present to her. The "willow-cabin" outburst to the Countess, and the description of the imaginary sister who "never told her love," were, however, given with a visible realisation of their poetical beauty. The collapse in tears after the Duke's exit in the scene in which the latter passage occurs was a legitimate illumina-

“ Twelfth Night ”

tion of the text. And if now and then the actress seemed to chant her verses—well, she has a musical voice, to which it is an æsthetic pleasure to listen. In the duel scene she “let herself go,” as the saying is—never vulgarly or boisterously, but sufficiently to express the terrors of a girl at finding a naked sword in her hand and a supposedly fierce antagonist facing her with another. The whole scene was played to a ripple of laughter from the audience, which swelled into a roar as Augecheek fell on all fours, and his opponent nervously approached him, gave him a tap between the shoulders, and then darted away overcome with alarm at her own temerity. It was genuine comedy, which one could enjoy without forfeiting one’s self-respect, and one cannot say that as often as one would like to in connection with Shakspearean performances in the present day. Mr. Crawley, as the Foolish Knight, also played with a quiet drollery all too rare on our stage, when the poet’s farcical scenes are being rendered ; and equal praise is due to the richly humorous Sir Toby of Mr. Buckstone and the blithe Maria of an actress for many years well known in London, and whom it was a real pleasure to welcome again, Miss Kate Phillips.

Mr. E. H. Sothern’s Malvolio, a slow-moving mass of solemn and stuffy egotism, was always artistic, and was, of course, at its best in the scene of the finding of the letter and the subse-

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quent exhibition of his smiles and cross-gartering to his amazed mistress. No fussy elaboration marred the performance; every glance and movement grew naturally out of the text; and the humorous fancy of the poet was allowed to speak for itself. The result was that the audience were always amused and never worried. In the scene in which the faithful steward, candle in hand and nightcap on head, stalks in and rebukes the kitchen revellers, we missed the gravity of the level tones in which Irving used to hush not only Sir Toby and Co., but the crowded theatre to an awful stillness; but the tableau, on which the curtain fell, of the two knights lying helpless on the floor while the clown crouched in the glow of the fire singing the refrain of "What is Love? 'Tis not Hereafter" to his guitar made a striking finish to the scene.

The leading players were recalled several times after each act with hearty enthusiasm, but the theatre was not so full as it deserved to be. Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe have travelled thousands of miles, unheralded by blatant trumpetings of any kind, to present us with a noble repertory of plays. They have brought a fine company with them, costly scenery and appointments, and an artistic direction. May we be allowed to say that their enterprise deserves the respect and support of all playgoers who can appreciate a modest spirit combined with the loftiest motives?

"AS YOU LIKE IT"

*Waldorf Theatre,
April 29th, 1907.*

MISS JULIA MARLOWE'S Rosalind brings out, as we expected it would, the dignity, poetry, and comedy of the part in memorable fashion. The early scenes in the court were played with just the right suggestion of a proud young Princess living on sufferance. When the decree of banishment was pronounced, this Rosalind struck no theatrical attitude of amazement, gave utterance to no ill-bred cry of wrath, but stood motionless with accusing eyes fixed on the uncle, whose character she had quietly summed up long since. The plea to be acquainted with the fault of which she had been guilty was uttered with dignity as well as with feeling, and the subsequent repudiation of the charge of treason with a fine anger and scorn. Then, in the scene with Celia, came the first touch of comedy, in the curtle-axe speech. Those who can recall Miss Ada Rehan's Rosalind will remember that her delivery of this passage used to be followed nightly with a burst of applause that, for a time, stopped the play.

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No other actress we have seen in the part has made that particular effect. Miss Marlowe did not. But the passage was given with splendid spirit, and proved an eloquent prelude to the forest scenes. These were played with such a naturalness and freshness that, familiar as it all is, the dialogue seemed endowed with new life. Often, too, the actress's listening was as eloquent as her speech. The swooning at the sight of Orlando's blood-stained handkerchief, and the subsequent effort to show that it had been mere counterfeiting, were powerfully done, and brought the curtain down on the third act amid great applause, which was renewed after some more brilliant comedy in the final scenes with Orlando prior to the disclosure of her real identity. To sum up : Miss Julia Marlowe's Rosalind is one that will appeal to cultured playgoers by its grace of personality, its air of high breeding, the poetry and romance with which it is charged, its warmth of womanliness (the final kiss to Phœbe was a delightful touch), and its suggestion of radiant joy. It never takes us by storm as Ada Rehan's did ; but it steals into the heart and imagination, and abides there, a welcome guest.

"ROMEO AND JULIET"

*Waldorf Theatre,
May 2nd, 1907.*

IT is one of the stalest of platitudes that the part of Juliet is unrealisable on the stage; for to be perfect in it the actress has to be too young to have had the necessary experience, and too experienced to have retained the necessary youthfulness. And the same applies to the part of Romeo. Those antiphons of trembling ecstasy, the balcony scene and the parting of the lovers in the bridal chamber, can only be realised with full effect when the actors have the ardour and beauty of youth. On the other hand, the scenes in which Romeo flies like a tiger at Tybalt, flings himself to the floor in the Friar's cell, and buys the potion from the Apothecary demand a tragedian of power; while a débutante in the potion scene, however prettily she might look the part, could never act it. If, however, in the nature of things, a full physical and artistic realisation of the parts is impossible, something near the ideal is always within the reach of a few players; and in this little band (so far as the present-day

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stage goes) Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe have now to be included. The best proofs of the strength of their performances were the rapt stillness with which they were followed by a large audience, and the heartiness with which they were cheered after all the principal scenes.

Miss Marlowe's Juliet, when first we meet her, is a joyous creature, happy in the daily round of life. The mention of the County Paris as a possible husband moves her to a smile, and the subject is presently dismissed with a laugh, for such matters as love and marriage have not occupied her at all. The meeting with Romeo changes her in an instant. All the warm-blooded humanity and "Pagan innocence of the Renaissance" spring up in her. Her love is not an affair of the intellect or a piece of pretty idealism. It is Romeo's "gracious self" that is "the god of her idolatry," and when the Nurse praises his physical beauty to her, she embraces her ecstatically. More "elegant" Juliets have been seen, quite nice, reserved young ladies, who have visibly not forgotten the teachings of their governesses; and they have often been charmingly pretty, and always hopelessly wrong. Only the most complete self-abandonment to passion could have led this ill-starred pair to the transports and the disasters that follow, and both Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe brought this out clearly

"Romeo and Juliet"

from the beginning, to the logical and dramatic gain of the whole play. We have never known the balcony scene played with a more tender reverence in the Romeo or a completer vibration of the whole being of Juliet. The sombre middle and tragic close of the play found them equally eloquent, and, if space permitted, it would be a pleasure to dwell on many powerful and original moments in both impersonations. The atmosphere of refined taste which has been so marked in all the Sothorn-Marlowe productions was again conspicuous in the whole presentation of the tragedy.

AGUGLIA AND GRASSO IN "CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA" AND "LA ZOLFARA"

Shaftesbury Theatre,
February 7th, 1908.

A STRANGE thing has happened in London. A few days ago a company of Sicilian players made their first appearance at the Shaftesbury Theatre in a play called "Malia" before a house by no means full or disposed to be excited. When the curtain fell on the last act the theatre rang with applause, and now everybody is talking about Mimi Aguglia and Giovanni Grasso, and the house is being packed nightly. The intellectual and fashionable worlds are crowding to see them; and the theatre is sparkling nightly like Covent Garden when a great singer is in the bill.

One can derive a very good idea of the quality of the new-comers by their work in "Cavalleria Rusticana" (given, of course, as a drama, not as an opera) and Giuste Zenopole's three-act play, "La Zolfara." The story of the former

Aguglia and Grasso

is, of course, known practically to everyone. It is that to which Mascagni has written his best-known opera score. That of "La Zolfara" can be briefly summarised. Mara, an inn-keeper's daughter, loves Japicu, the villainous overseer of a sulphur mine, but at her mother's bidding marries Vanni, an honest, decent fellow, who is devoted to her. After the marriage, however, Japicu continues his attentions to the wife, and the guilty pair are finally caught in each other's arms by the husband. The would-be seducer makes his escape through the window, Vanni drags the wedding ring from his wife's finger, and kicks her out of the house; and the curtain falls upon his outburst of bitter weeping.

In "Cavalleria Rusticana" Signora Aguglia, as Santuzza, creates a disturbing impression. She is undoubtedly an actress of quite unusual gifts. The misery, jealousy, and vindictiveness of the neglected girl all find in her the most vivid expression. Her face is not, strictly speaking, beautiful. There is, as one might say of a Parisian actress, a good deal more of Montmartre in it than of the Faubourg. But it is always eloquent. The large, flexible mouth and fine eyes can express the hate, scorn, tenderness, or malignity of a Sicilian peasant-woman instantaneously and unmistakably. Seldom have we seen a face change so swiftly and so completely. More than once in "Cavalleria Rusticana" there was a long pause, in which the

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actress's face alone spoke ; but one could see various passions sweeping across it as clearly as one sometimes sees the shadows of clouds chasing each other up a smooth hill-side or over the sea. To sit in one's stall and watch that ever-changing, eloquent face was a curiously fascinating experience. Then her gesticulation—that branch of expression of which our English players avail themselves so little—how rich, varied, and graphic it is ! In common with many Latin actresses, Signora Aguglia uses gestures which would be impossible to an English artist, and, even if employed, would probably appear absurd to an English audience. In her case, they all seem perfectly natural, and help in a remarkable way to illuminate the dialogue. She may go to the extreme of prodigality in the matter ; but we think our own players may be equally wrong in displaying so marked an economy. Thirdly, and lastly, Signora Aguglia has cultivated the flexibility of the voice to such a degree that she can control an audience by speaking in almost any tone, from a serio-comic squeak to a deep note charged with tragedy and fate.

In “*La Zolfara*” she gave some comedy that was delightful. Her first entry in this caused us to rub our eyes. A few minutes before she had been the pale, distraught Santuzza. Here, as Mara, she was a rosy-cheeked, bold-eyed, plump young person, evidently charged to the

Aguglia and Grasso

full with mischief and wickedness ; a good deal of a cat, yet in her common little way a fascinating cat, and one who, like Mrs. Elvsted in Ibsen's play, would probably have a finger in the shaping of some man's destiny. She came in with a bottle of wine in each hand, and laid them on the table. There were two other persons on the stage, her mother and the man, Japicu ; and she gave a glance at each of them and disappeared. But what glances they were ! The whole audience burst into laughter and then into applause. Afterwards there was a scene in which, while her mother was rating her for her partiality for Japicu, she sat mutinously making a " rabbit " with her handkerchief and then letting it jump from her hand to the floor. Trifling enough " business," the reader will say, yet one could see that in every part of the house the audience was watching it with the keenest enjoyment. Then, again, in the scene of *câlinerie* with Japicu, with what an abandonment of wicked happiness she flung herself into his arms, and petted and fondled him ! And in the grim *dénouement*, when, shrieking, gabbling, and trembling with terror, she fell at her husband's feet, how eloquent was everything she did, and how mean, yet how pitiful, the wretched, huddling creature seemed ! We have only seen Signora Aguglia in two parts, and they have had a good deal in common with each other ; but, inside the limitations so far set to

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her, she strikes us as a great actress. How much of that impression is caused by technique, and how much by the actress's own temperamental qualities, is a question we cannot answer yet. All we can do is to set down, as clearly as may be, some of the impressions left by an evening of considerable excitement.

The cheering after both plays was prolonged and enthusiastic, and Signor Giovanni Grasso conspicuously shared in the triumph. His Alfio and Vanni were as realistic and as sincere as the impersonations of his sister-artist. Indeed, it was largely his splendid acting in the finale of "La Zolfara" that brought the curtain down amid such a general roar. Moreover, every member of the company seems to aim at *living* his or her part; and many of the stage conventions familiar in this country are completely ignored. For example, several times we noticed two, and sometimes three, and even four, people talking at one and the same time, on the stage, the effect being singularly natural. And in one scene, in "La Zolfara," while the two chief players were acting at one end of the stage, a group of women were keeping up a quiet, but perfectly audible, desultory conversation at the other. It gave one a very agreeable shock to find the artistic passion for realism carried to such a length as that.

"LA FIGLIA DI JORIO"

By Gabriele d'Annunzio

*Shaftesbury Theatre,
February 10th, 1908.*

WRITING of Signora Mimi Aguglia, we have already expressed the opinion that within the limitations so far set she is a great actress. Her performance in Gabriele d'Annunzio's so-called pastoral tragedy, "La Figlia di Jorio," both confirmed that impression, and, to a certain extent, suggested her limitations. In the expression of terror verging on insanity, of malignant loathing, and of sudden animalistic tenderesses, she surpasses any actress we have seen. In "La Figlia di Jorio" her panic-stricken shrinking from the advances of her lover's father—himself, *horribile dictu*, also her "lover"—is an extraordinary piece of acting. A comparatively calm Briton might, indeed, be excused for thinking it grossly overdone. Those dreadful workings of the eyes and contortions of the whole face; the cries that were now a gabble, now a shriek; the figure huddled in a corner and for ever edging away—were not

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pleasant things to look at or to listen to. They suggested a terrified animal rather than a human being ; or, if a human being, then, surely, one of those microcephalic creatures one sometimes see in a hospital ward, smiling or frowning at nothing, and making monkey-like clutchings at the bed-clothes, that send a shiver through the spectator, and occasion him strange inward questionings on certain points of dogmatic theology. They, certainly, were quite unlike the behaviour of any conceivable normal English-woman, even under such hideous circumstances. Yet, when one recovered from the first shock and horror of the spectacle, and recalled the vivid expression of all the passions which is natural to the Southerner : above all, when one saw how absorbed the artist was in her work, and how the audience did not seem to exist for her, all thought of the ugliness of the exhibition was lost in enthusiastic admiration of the actress's sincerity and power.

It was, however, in the final scene that we felt a demand had been made to which Signora Aguglia was unable to respond. Those who have read the play itself, or the account of it which appeared a year or two ago when it was first produced in Italy, will remember that Aligio, a villager in the Abruzzi, and his father, Lazzaro, both fall in love with a mysterious maid of doubtful reputation named Mila ; that the son, in a jealous fury, slays his father ; and

“ La Figlia di Forio ”

that the girl declares herself the guilty one and surrenders herself to the death of a witch and a murderess. It was in offering this great sacrifice that the actress seemed to fall short. Her physique and her physiognomy would, probably, not lend themselves very readily to the sublime ; but Signora Aguglia's self-accusations and self-devotion to the stake impressed us as little more than hysterical. One felt that they were the expression of a mood of the moment, not of a calm, grand resolve. And the impression was deepened when she allowed herself to be borne away struggling violently with the captors to whom she has surrendered. It may be that Signor d'Annunzio does not require the scene to be one of sublime self-immolation at the bidding of Love. Indeed, the story is sufficiently degraded for the most squalid of endings to be perfectly in harmony with most of what has gone before. We should have imagined, however, that the feeling in Mila's mind at the end was that of one of the verses of Carducci, *sol ne la morte è il vero!* This Mila did not find the True only in Death. She clung to life ; and kicked, shrieked, and almost bit the men who were taking her to her voluntary martyrdom. It was wonderful acting. But—it seemed Signora Aguglia's line of least resistance.

A word as to the play itself. It has been a year or two coming to London, and we could

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have borne it with fortitude had its arrival been still longer delayed. Its chief *motif*, the infatuation of a grey-haired father for the girl with whom his married son is also infatuated, is detestable ; and the scene in the mountain cave, in which, having had his " rival " bound and carried off, the old man, smiling, sniggering, and evil, advances stealthily upon the girl, is nothing less than disgusting. Indeed, the whole thing is morbid to a degree—the work of a man suffering from exacerbated nerves and distorted moral vision. To call it " pastoral " is grossly to abuse a beautiful word. It is decadent. And the dullness of the long conversations with which the thing is sprinkled, the absence of humour of any healthful sort, and the monotony and misery spread over the three acts, appear to us to justify the view of a writer in the " Quarterly " who a few years ago reminded Englishmen that the reputation for intellectual superiority which Signor d'Annunzio enjoys through the continent of Europe is greater than that which he can boast in the Peninsula. His plays " La Figlia di Jorio," " La Gioconda," and " Francesca da Rimini " have now been seen in London. In the first, that little whirlwind, Signora Aguglia, is all that we can remember with any pleasure. In the other two, Eleanora Duse towered sublimely above the work which she was honouring by touching.

GRASSO IN "MORTE CIVILE"

*The Shaftesbury Theatre,
February 13th, 1908.*

THE Sicilians have conquered again in Giacometti's famous play "Morte Civile," with Signor Grasso as the husband. The curtain did not fall finally until half-past eleven; but, with the exception of a few who fled precipitately before the realism of the death-scene, the large audience remained to the end, and cheered Signor Grasso to the echo. The character gave him a finer opportunity than any other in which we have so far seen him, and his performance created a profound impression. He reminds us in many ways of the Charles Warner of twenty years ago. There is the same musical quality of voice, the same nervous force, the same capacity of complete absorption in the character. Added to all these, there is, of course, the Latin's infinitely greater abundance, variety, and expressiveness of gesture. Mr. Warner's Coupeau in the early eighties was voted, not only by the critics of London, but by many who crossed the Channel to see it at the Princess's, a great piece of acting; great not

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only in the realism of the more lurid passages, but in the large humanity of its earlier scenes ; and we pay the Italian actor no mean compliment when we compare him favourably with the creator of that memorable impersonation. From his first entry Signor Grasso held the audience riveted. The hunted, escaped criminal, separated from wife and child, longing for both and denied them, and, in the end, dying by his own hand for their sakes, was a figure on which it was often painful to look. The speech in which he described the murder which had led to his imprisonment was given with astonishing force, and drew an irresistible and prolonged burst of applause from the house ; while the longing for his child, and the anguish with which the wretched man realised that he must not claim her, were expressed with a poignancy that moved many to tears.

As to the death-scene, there will, we fancy, be two opinions. It was horrible in the extreme. Aguglia herself has not surpassed its realism. As we have said, it drove some of the audience to the doors. The cries of agony as the poison did its work, and the appalling facial and bodily contortions were really intolerable. No one could fail to respect the power and sincerity of the actor ; but this photography of the horrible and the morbid may really be carried too far. It is sufficiently trying, though, of course, perfectly legitimate, when used to illustrate evil passions

Grasso in "Morte Civile"

and poignant emotions ; but when it is applied to the act of death itself, the borderland of Art is crossed. When all was over, and the curtain had fallen and risen again, and the actor, smiling and handsome, came forward in response to calls, the cheering was tremendous. Nor do we grudge Signor Grasso any of the ovation. It had been earned by a wonderful effort. But we think it was an inartistic effort—just as we should think the picture of the flaying of a martyr inartistic, however minutely accurate might be the rendering of its physiological detail.

“FEUDALISMO”

*The Shaftesbury Theatre,
February 28th, 1908.*

OUR Sicilian visitors have added Guimera's Spanish play "Tierra Baja" to their London repertory, presenting it under the title "Feudalismo," and, of course, playing it in Italian. Its story is not less sordid than those of a good many of the plays that have preceded it. It concerns the abuse, in its worst form, of certain old-time seignorial rights, and reveals a furious husband's discovery of his wife's pre-nuptial dishonour, and his ultimate vengeance both on the woman and on the landowner, his master, who caused it. Signora Aguglia, as the wife, revealed no fresh aspect of her talent. Those, however, with which the public are already familiar, proved quite sufficient for her admirers. It is, perhaps, worth noting that at one point in the second act she delivered a long soliloquy not merely looking into the fire, but with her back turned completely to the audience; and that it "held" the house as powerfully as any other scene in the play. Those of our own actors and actresses who believe it impossible to create a satisfactory

“ *Feudalismo* ”

effect save with the full face in view of the spectators might study certain reticences of the Sicilians with advantage. In the part of the husband Signor Grasso gave another powerful display of passion ; and Signor Lo Turco was as good as ever in that of the evil landlord. The house was crowded ; and Aguglia and Grasso were called again and again at the finish of each act and cheered with the utmost enthusiasm.

GRASSO AS OTHELLO

*The Lyric Theatre,
March 21st, 1910.*

THE Sicilian actor, Giovanni Grasso, has made his first appearance in London as Othello, and has won the most emphatic personal triumph he has so far enjoyed in this country. Reports which have reached London from Italy were completely fulfilled; and the new Othello is emphatically a thing to be seen. Most of the interval between the third and fourth acts was spent by the audience at the Lyric Theatre in calling and cheering him to the echo; and similar demonstrations came again in overwhelming volume at the end of the evening.

Bearded, brown rather than black, and bearing himself with great dignity, this Othello fulfilled at first sight his description of himself: "I fetch my life and being from men of royal siege." He looked a Moor, but a royal Moor—a savage, if you will, but a noble savage. His manner before the Duke and Senators in the council chamber was frank and manly; and he told the story of his wooing of Desdemona quite

Grasso as Othello

simply. At the words "Her father loved me," old Brabantio started from his chair as though to contradict him, whereupon he calmly repeated "loved me" and went on with his story. At the entry of Desdemona his eyes fell, and remained so during her public avowal of her love, and even during the embrace she gave him. Only when the Duke and the Court had gone and Brabantio had flung his bitter taunt at him and followed the rest, leaving them alone together, did he lift his eyes to her face. It had been as though he would not share even a glance with her before others. And when he kissed her it was not her lips that he kissed, *more Siciliano*, but her hair or her fingers, with a courtly reverence. The cry of "My life upon her faith!" had a thrilling effect before the end of the act.

In the second act, the meeting of the couple on the Cyprus quay, the re-entry of Othello at the uproar of the duel, and the rebuke and dismissal of Cassio, still further revealed the actor's grasp of the character; and then came the third act, the great act of the whole play, and that in which every Othello, from Kean to Salvini, has made his greatest effects. Here Grasso showed in his most graphic way the gradual absorption of Iago's poison. Once he failed—or so we thought. The "Farewell the tranquil mind" began in tones of great pathos, but ended wrongly, we think, in something like angry

Nights at the Play

declamation. At the end of the speech, "If thou dost slander her," however, came a moment that electrified the house—a repetition of Salvini's furious catching of Iago by the throat, flinging him to the floor, raising a foot to trample on him, bending over him as though to choke him to death, and finally recoiling and collapsing into a chair in a convulsion of shame and rage. The rendering of this scene was superb, and finest of all in its end, showing the gradual dying away of the almost insane fury—the breath caught with difficulty, the whole body shaking, the face convulsed. Afterwards the "Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!" was given with great intensity; and an act which had held the audience enthralled finished with a rapid hysterical exit, with hoarse cries, whether of rage or grief it was hard to say. They might have been either with perfect propriety—or both.

In the fourth act (we refer, of course, to the version presented, not to the poet's arrangement) the handling of the scene of the taxing of Desdemona with the loss of the handkerchief created less effect than was expected. We thought Grasso's manner in the opening passages far too cordial, and the display of languorous uxoriousness more picturesque than probable in view of what had gone before, and what was to follow in a few moments. The actor seemed to have forgotten that from the beginning of this scene Othello is full of suspicion and bitter-

Grasso as Othello

ness. The subsequent scene with Iago, however, led to another tremendous outburst in the speech that concludes with the falling into a trance, or an epilepsy as Iago puts it ; and once more a well-devised exit brought the curtain down. Finally came the bedchamber scene ; a stealthy entry and pacing of the room, the brief colloquy with Desdemona, hurried through very naturally, a murder, realistic enough, but mercifully hidden by the bed-curtains, a thrilling cry of horror and fury at the discovery of Iago's villainy and Desdemona's innocence, and a suicide and death so realistic in all their prolonged details—including a hideous death-rattle—that they were too much for some of the audience, though the skill of the actor brought the curtain down amid a roar. Not perhaps a perfect performance of the part, but certainly the most overpowering seen in this city since Salvini was here last.

ALBERT HEINE IN "DIE CONDOTTIERI"

*The Great Queen Street Theatre,**

June 3rd, 1907.

RUDOLF HERZOG's tragic "Die Condottieri," with its thrilling story, from Venetian history in the fifteenth century, has been acted for the first time in London by a company that included four leading members of the Munich Court Theatre, all of whom made a successful first appearance here, while in one of them, Herr Albert Heine, the audience had the pleasure of recognising a very powerful actor indeed. The author himself had come over from Germany for the performance, and was called and cheered twice after the second act and twice again at the finish of the fourth; and, save that in the third act one of the players, Herr Joseph Idali, fainted, causing the curtain to fall for a few moments and necessitating the remainder of his part being read from the book by a substitute, the evening was one of brilliant success.

The essential part of the story of "Die

* Now known as the Kingsway Theatre.

Albert Heine in "Die Condottieri"

Condottieri" deals with the last ambition of Bartolommeo Colleoni, the famous Venetian mercenary commander. Feeling the hand of death drawing near, he demands that his long services shall be recognised by the Council of Ten ordering his statue to be erected in the city, also that his natural son, Giovanni, shall be proclaimed his lawful heir. On being told that the Council will grant neither of his requests, he orders his armour to be buckled on; and, tied in a chair to keep him from falling, he is carried into the presence of the Council. Sitting there, a grim figure, with his son standing behind him, he recounts his services to the Republic, and demands the reward on which he has set his heart, only to meet with a further refusal; and in the middle of a paroxysm of fury death comes to him suddenly, the old soldier's last act being to draw the visor of his helmet down over his face. He is left thus, sitting in the presence of the Council, a corpse; but Giovanni, stooping down to his dead father, and pretending that whispers are still coming from the motionless lips, continues the demand for the statue and the recognition, the only result being a final refusal. The corpse is carried to its home and, still in the chair and in armour, with only the helmet removed, is placed behind some curtains. Presently the Dogaressa, Beatrice, who has been Colleoni's mistress and the subject of a good deal of his tyranny, and who is now loved by

Nights at the Play

Giovanni, comes to inquire after the Generalissimo. The son draws the curtains and points to the seated figure with the closed eyes. The Princess advances slowly, breathing the name "Bartolommeo," and puzzled at the silence. At last she nervously touches the dead man's hand and then, with a scream of horror and terror that presently becomes one of wild exultation, she recoils. "Dead!" she shrieks. "No," cries Giovanni. "He lives! Lives in Me!" and in a passionate frenzy he catches her in his arms as the curtain falls.

Again and again this dramatic story gave us that rare thing in a theatre nowadays, the cold wave over the cheek, "a fearful joy," however, for which the acting was equally responsible. In the part of the commander Herr Heine presented throughout a figure of great impressiveness, and acted with remarkable power. The ruthless old tyrant, cruel voluptuary, and dignified soldier lived before us; while the rendering of the long speech before the Council, with its varying moods, was an elocutionary *tour de force* to which it was a delight to listen. Herr Heine is undoubtedly a great actor. In the part of Giovanni, the handsome Herr August Weigart looked and acted well; and Fräulein Clara Rabbitow as the Dogaressa presented a figure of rare dignity and beauty, and acted with thrilling force in the chief scenes, particularly in the *dénouement*. In the part of a

Albert Heine in "Die Condottieri"

loyal old captain in attendance on the commander, Herr Andresen played with his usual finish, and to him fell the few flashes of humour that lightened the four sombre acts; while other parts were well rendered by Fräulein Herta von Hagen, Herr Hans Stock, and Herr Paul Wind. We are not quite sure how far the final apparition of the commander is justified on artistic grounds, but there can be no two opinions as to the reality of the uncomfortable shiver it gives; and the swift changes of emotion in the last scene between Giovanni and Beatrice bring the play to a thrilling close. There is, of course, something ugly in the "love-interest," but it had been modified in the acting version presented last night by the apparent omission of all references to the fact of Giovanni's illegitimacy and the commander being actually his father. Apart from that, we are disposed to reckon "*Die Condottieri*" one of the most impressive dramas of our day. And it is, in a way, agreeable to recall that the statue on which the old soldier had so set his heart was given to him after all, and, begun by Verrocchio and completed by Leopardi, has long been one of the glories of Venice.

Reading the other day that volume of priceless criticism, G. H. Lewes' "*Actors and Acting*," we came upon the following passage:

At a German Hof Theatre one is sure of the very best ensemble that the company can present, and one will

Nights at the Play

often receive as much pleasure from the performance of quite insignificant parts as from the leading parts on other stages. The actors are thoroughly trained ; they know the principles of their art—a very different thing from knowing the “ business ” ! They pay laudable attention to one supremely important point recklessly disregarded on our stage, namely elocution. They know how to speak—both verse and prose ; to speak without mouthing, yet with effective cadence ; speech elevated above the tone of conversation without being stilted.

This was written in 1867, and every word of it applies to their successors, the German actors and actresses of the present day.

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